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ABSTRACT

Summarizing the wealth of recent research on sentence combining as an effective method of teaching students to tighten and vary their written sentences, this booklet explains how and why sentence combining works. The first half of the booklet provides background information on sentence combining, exploring the basis for the claim that sentence combining enhances sentence writing by drawing on built-in linguistic competence, and arguing for a much broader definition of sentence combining. This section also discusses seven instructional issues concerning the use of sentence combining, and lists ten assumptions that seem to underlie the sentence combining approach. The second half of the booklet outlines many ways to use sentence combining in the writing class. This section first deals with cued sentence combining, of the kind popularized by F. O'Hare, then shows how open exercises might be introduced and used in a middle school classroom. It also deals with such practical matters as orchestrating in-class projects, handling "mistakes," and creating various types of sentence combining. The focus then shifts to a variation of pattern practice that may help special students, topics such as grammar, usage/mechanics, and sentence economy. Finally the section moves into arenas more explicitly rhetorical--style, recombining, and generative exercises, the problem of context, and analytic activities of different kinds. (HTH)

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Creative Approaches to Sentence Combining

William Strong

CS210082

ERIC

CREATIVE APPROACHES TO SENTENCE COMBINING

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National Council of Teachers of English

For Carol, whose words combine, entwine, with mine

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CONTENTS

List of Activities vii
Foreword ix

1 Theory and Research 1
Introduction 1
The Background of Sentence Combining 3
Sentence Combining Defined 4
Later Research on Sentence Combining 6
1. Sentence Combining and Writing Quality 7
2. Sentence Combining and Syntactic Error 9
3. The Syntactic Fluency Hypothesis 10
4. Sentence-Combining Research in Perspective 12
The Great Debate over Sentence Combining 14
Seven Instructional Issues 17
1. Technique in Search of a Rationale 17
2. Sentence Combining versus Real Writing 17
3. Growth in Sentence-Making Skills 18
4. Sentence Combining and Rhetoric 19
5. Sentence Combining as Cognitive Nudging 19
6. A Psycholinguistically Valid Curriculum 20
7. The Future of Sentence Combining 21
A Summary of Ten Basic Assumptions 21

2 Practice 23
A Context for Sentence Combining 23
Answers to Twenty Questions 24
1. Introducing Cued (Signaled) SC 24
2. Introducing Open, Whole-Discourse SC 26
3. Structuring In-Class SC Practice 30
4. Handling "Wrong Answers" with SC 31
5. Creating Original SC Exercises 33
6. Creating SC from Student Texts 36
7. Using Content-Centered SC 38
8. Using SC as Pattern Practice 40

9. Exploring Transformations with SC 42
10. Using SC to Teach Grammar 43
11. Using SC for Usage and Mechanics 47
12. Teaching Lean, Direct Writing with SC 50
13. Focusing on Style with SC 51
14. Enhancing Appreciation through Recombining 56
15. Using "Dewriting" and Imitation 60
16. Generating Ideas with SC 62
17. Creating Context for SC Exercises 64
18. Teaching Thinking with SC 65
19. Teaching Cohesion with SC 70
20. Selecting, Adapting, and Scheduling SC 74
Sentence Combining in Retrospect 76

References 79

ACTIVITIES

1. Chapter 7: The Fisherman 15
2. Indentation Cues 28
3. Value Judgment 29
4. Closure Cues 32
5. Journal Prompts 34
6. Our Lunchroom 35
7. Crisis Ahead? 37
8. Fact Sheet: Whales 41
9. Mix-and-Match SC 44
10. School Politician 46
11. SC Exercise with Problem Sentences 49
12. Rules for Stronger Sentences 52
13. The Tattoo Artist 54
14. The Skier 57
15. A Story about Friendship 66
16. A Story about Trickery 67
17. An Essay about Terrorism 68
18. After School 69
19. The Lunsford Assignment 72
20. Classification Task 73

FOREWORD

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system developed by the U.S. Department of Education and sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). ERIC provides ready access to descriptions of exemplary programs, research and development reports, and related information useful in developing effective educational programs.

Through its network of specialized centers or clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for a particular educational area, ERIC acquires, evaluates, abstracts, and indexes current information and lists that information in its reference publications.

The ERIC system has already made available—through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service—a considerable body of data, including all federally funded research reports since 1956. However, if the findings of educational research are to be used by teachers, much of the data must be translated into an essentially different context. Rather than resting at the point of making research reports readily accessible, OERI has directed the ERIC clearinghouses to commission authorities in various fields to write information analysis papers.

As with all federal educational information efforts, ERIC has as a primary goal bridging the gap between educational theory and classroom practice. One method of achieving that goal is the development by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) of a series of booklets designed to meet concrete educational needs. Each booklet provides teachers with a review of the best educational theory and research on a limited topic, followed by descriptions of classroom activities that will assist teachers in putting that theory into practice.

The idea is not unique. Several educational journals and many commercial textbooks offer similar aids. The ERIC/RCS booklets are, however, noteworthy in their sharp focus on educational needs and their pairing of sound academic theory with tested classroom practice. And they have been developed in response to the increasing number of requests from teachers to provide this kind of service.

Topics for these booklets are recommended by the ERIC/RCS National Advisory Board. Suggestions for topics are welcomed by the Board and should be directed to the Clearinghouse.

Charles Suhor
Director, ERIC/RCS

THEORY AND RESEARCH

Introduction

This sentence, the one you are now reading, is one that I have never made before. And, presumably, it is also one that you have never before decoded.

And yet I am able to make these never-before-formed sentences—and you are able to read them—with astonishing ease. It is the miracle of language revisited.

You see, I am not *thinking* about grammar as this sentence unfolds itself across a yellow notepad at 35,000 feet above the Colorado Rockies. Rather, I am *doing* grammar. And you, in turn, are probably focused not so much on the syntax of my sentences as on their content. In fact, you may well be asking yourself, What does all of this have to do with sentence combining?

The fact that both of us are processing sentences *automatically*—using our built-in linguistic competence to concentrate on meaning—is a very important starting point. Neither of us has to think about nominalization or adjective embedding, for example, to deal with the previous sentence. We simply do it. Indeed, if we were to concentrate fully on our moment-to-moment processing of words, we would block out the message being expressed.

Just how we acquire this automaticity with print is not fully understood. After all, no one can directly observe what is happening as we write or read sentences. Yet psycholinguists can make informed guesses and try to construct an explanation that seems consistent with findings about language acquisition. The point of such theorizing is to move teaching from the arena of rumor, folk knowledge, and gimmickry toward something approaching a professional enterprise. In other words, theory becomes useful as it informs our teaching.

Many teachers now believe that automaticity is not so much learned from rules as it is subconsciously *acquired* on a number of levels. In writing, learners assign meaning to scribbles, gradually acquiring routines for spelling, punctuation, and basic conventions. Simultaneously, they draw upon prior knowledge (and the print environment) to internalize "genre" routines such as making lists, telling stories, writing letters, and preparing reports. And at a higher level still, they come to use rhetorical routines—or more often a lack of them—for planning, organizing, and rewriting in relation to purpose and audience.

The point is that when subroutines are done more or less automatically, one becomes increasingly able to attend to the things that matter in writing—namely, the content and coherence of the message. Conversely, when the focus is on low-level issues, one can barely consider, let alone act upon, the *real* basics. This assumption is fundamental to all that follows.

A second basic assumption centers on the fact that writing is "frozen speech" in one sense, yet quite unlike speech in many ways. In other words, competence in oral language—especially one's access to what Vygotsky called "inner speech"—drives the act of writing. At the same time, however, writing transcends speech. Because writers do not have access to yawns, raised eyebrows, or other conversational cues, they must rely on the text itself to sustain and alter their intentions.

Advice from writers points to this paradoxical quality of writing. "Don't forget to read aloud," novelist Anne Tyler urges. While nonfiction author Robert Duncan would not disagree, he also says that "the writing has its own demands. It is in charge and it will tell me what to do if I pay attention to it." Thus, the second assumption is that the shift from conversation to printed text begins with speech. By helping students draw upon their intuitions, we heighten their ownership of the text even as they distance themselves from it.

After reviewing the research on writing instruction, Stephen Krashen (1984, 20) says that writing *competence*—the abstract knowledge that proficient

writers have about text—"comes only from large amounts of self-motivated reading for interest and/or pleasure." The key to both oral and written acquisition, according to Krashen, is "comprehensible input"; that is, people focus on what is communicated, not how it is expressed.

Krashen believes that such self-constructed knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for developing skill in writing. In a synthesis of research on reading/writing relationships, Sandra Stotsky (1983) confirms that reading ability and reading experience consistently correlate with writing skill.

To develop writing *performance* also requires practice. And it is in this domain—helping students develop good strategies for composing—that day-to-day coaching can pay off. Prewriting talk, conferring on drafts, modeling basic "moves" in writing, using checklists and scoring rubrics—all provide "scaffolding" for teaching (rather than merely assigning) writing. As for linguistic etiquette, Krashen (1984, 27) says that "conscious knowledge of rules of grammar and usage helps only at the editing stage and is limited to straightforward, learnable aspects of grammar."

A third assumption of this Theory and Research section is that real writing typically evolves through a messy, recursive process of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—sometimes one step ahead and two steps back. Ideally, students write for a variety of purposes and audiences, dealing with topics that have personal meaning. Effective instruction often begins with what James Britton et al. (1975) call "expressive writing" and moves toward "poetic" (imaginative, fictional) forms or "transactional" (informative, functional) modes. The process, as I see it, looks something like the drawing in figure 1.

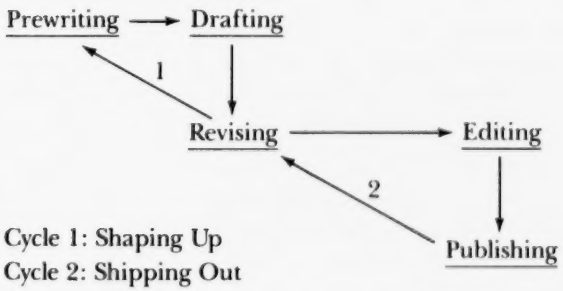

Figure 1. The Writing Process Revisited

In this conception, the writing process is viewed as two related cycles. The point of connection between these cycles—the "heart" of the process—is revising. At the revising stage, one is either moving back *into* the text for further thinking and drafting or *out* of it to deal with language conventions. These moves reflect subtle shifts in intention.

A rarely mentioned fact about the writing process is that publishing is not necessarily the final step. After all, writers do hope that popular demand will force them to revise. But in any case, "writing is never final," as Donald Murray (1982, 7) puts it. "The writer goes on to discover, explore, and map the evolution of his personal worlds of inner space."

As an instructional approach, sentence combining (SC) provides practice mainly in revising and editing, with limited use in the area of prewriting. So SC is hardly a model of the total process. In fact, even in the areas of revising and editing, it only simulates some of what actually happens. Whether simulation makes sense in language education is a major issue for both theorists and classroom teachers. I invite you to think about this question in some depth in what follows.

For now, it is worth remembering that we live in a house called language and that words cannot describe how words work. Language is so completely a part of us—like breathing—that it is debatable whether we are using it or it is using us.

On the other hand, words can wonder aloud at their own power, a real alternative to silence. They can also extend, clarify, or consolidate our thinking about various matters—including language development. And, most importantly, words themselves are wonderful teachers. By simply playing with them and paying attention to them, we somehow internalize how they go together.

I take the position that SC exercises are a curious kind of "comprehensible input": learners *construct* sentences (or surface meanings) from underlying propositions. I make no claim that doing a few SC exercises can improve writing competence. Massive amounts of language processing are required to internalize the codes of written language. What I do claim, however, is that SC exercises provide a practical way of activating playful attention to written language.

For some students, the consequence of this attention is reduced writing anxiety, more flexibility and risk taking in sentence construction, and a willing-

ness to rescan and rework text. In other words, SC may help with automaticity in syntax, freeing up mental energy so that learners can concentrate on planning and composing. My hunch is that almost all of this happens on the performance side of the competence/performance distinction. I also think that revising and editing are the main skills affected by SC practice.

Echoing Frank Smith (1983), I believe that attention to words is activated to the extent that we feel part of a language community or "club." SC provides a context, albeit a temporary and artificial one, for students to teach one another how words pattern in different ways. This club gives each learner immediate feedback on whether his or her sentences make sense. Such feedback may serve as a skill-building adjunct to a program of instruction and practice in writing. I will later conclude, however, that SC exercises are of limited utility in the bigger picture—the construction of personal meaning.

In short, language itself is the real teacher for all of us. By attending to words, we gradually increase our naturalness in writing and reading until encoding/decoding processes are almost fully automatic and accomplished without conscious attention to syntax.

SC is one way of paying attention to words so that their patterning can be better understood. In this section, I discuss the background of SC, its two principal formats, its track record in research, the "debate" over SC, and seven key issues related to the approach. My purpose is to present a balanced rationale for SC—one linked to current writing instruction.

The Background of Sentence Combining

The idea of having students manipulate or combine sentences as part of language/composition instruction is not new. In fact, SC is probably older than diagramming, its spiritual enemy.

Edward P. J. Corbett (1976) has pointed out that Erasmus, a fourteenth-century rhetorician, showed how a single sentence could be expressed 150 ways by altering syntax or diction. And Shirley Rose (1983, 489) notes that SC work was included in textbooks at the turn of the century. According to Rose, SC exercises were offered as "training to develop analytic-synthetic skills in construction of both thought and expression."

As Noam Chomsky's transformational/generative grammar enjoyed ascendancy in the early 1960s, it was only natural that SC exercises should be rediscovered. The transformational model proposed that language is governed by a finite set of rules for sounds, word formation, and syntax, all operating harmoniously. It is these rules, linguists hypothesized, that all neurologically normal children figure out and internalize, without being taught them in the conventional sense. Chomsky said that the human brain, thanks to its language acquisition device, is "wired" for language—innately predisposed to recognize and generate meaning in the form of sentences.

I should emphasize that Chomsky's grammar did not focus on usage—rules for subject/verb agreement, for example. Its purpose was to explain how language users can encode and decode never-before-formed sentences from just a few basic (or "kernel") sentence patterns. Its assertion was that typical sentences are actually comprised of many constituent kernels, each contributing in a patterned way to overall meaning. Transformational theory thus provided not only an analytic model but also a new metaphor for thinking about language, particularly writing.

To illustrate these points, I want to consider the last sentence of the preceding paragraph a little more closely. The following set of propositions sets forth its basic content in kernel form:

Theory thus provided a model.

The theory was transformational.

The model was analytic.

Theory thus provided a metaphor.

The metaphor was new.

The metaphor was for thinking.

The thinking was about language.

The language was writing in particular.

According to transformational theory, sentences such as these make up the "deep structure" (or underlying meaning) for the surface structure expressed earlier. Many surface structures can be derived from the same deep structure, depending on how the kernels are combined.

Chomsky later altered his ideas, saying that kernels were not real but merely an abstraction characterizing the deep structure of language. By this

time, however, the seeds of his earlier ideas (kernels themselves) had already taken root in the minds of many researchers and teachers. A "new linguistics" became fashionable, particularly after Chomsky dismantled B. F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* in a merciless review (Chomsky 1959).

Building on transformational premises, Kellogg Hunt (1965a, 1965b) began to study developmental differences among children on controlled language tasks. These tasks, which involved the rewriting of semantically related kernels "in a better way," were eventually administered to students from kindergarten through grade twelve as well as to skilled adults. Like Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg in other fields, Hunt was interested in the question of "stages." With the publication of *Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels* (1965a)—research corroborated and extended by Roy O'Donnell and colleagues (O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris 1967)—interest in SC methodology soon heated up.

Hunt, along with O'Donnell and his colleagues, documented what many experienced teachers had intuitively sensed: that as children grow older, their written language becomes more structurally complex. Their finding was that people of different ages use different strategies (or transformations) for relating sentences to each other. More specifically, they showed that increased clause length, depth of modification, and nominalization were natural features of developing maturity in syntax.

According to these researchers, expansion of independent clauses is an achingly slow process—one that occurs as children first convert underlying sentences into dependent clauses and then embed them; a later development still is the tightening of embedded clauses through deletion transformations.

John Mellon—and, later, Frank O'Hare—became widely known in the English teaching community for their research on SC. Both reported large gains in "syntactic fluency" ("syntactic maturity" in Hunt's terminology) in separate experiments with seventh graders.

O'Hare (1973) replicated Mellon's (1969) SC experiment with two key differences: (1) instead of cuing students with terms from previous language study, O'Hare provided explicit connecting words and other signals for achieving target sentences; and (2) instead of having an arhetorical emphasis, O'Hare tried to relate practice with discrete SC exercises to work in composition. Gains in writing quality reported by O'Hare sparked a flurry of research and raised the expectation that here, finally, was a laetrile for English education.

I need to stress here that the distinction between *maturity* and *fluency* is substantive, not merely semantic. For Mellon particularly, *maturity* resulted from normal growth in cognition and language; *fluency*, on the other hand, referred to a range of sentence types in student writing. In other words, Mellon separated the cognitive cause from its presumed manifestation in syntax. He was reluctant to conclude that gains in fluency (as defined here) would necessarily lead to gains in cognition or writing ability. Hunt (1970) was similarly diffident, suggesting that the observed tendency to embed is enhanced by real cognitive maturation—hardly a cause/effect claim. (Following Mellon's lead, I use the term *fluency*, but many SC researchers use *maturity*.)

Paralleling the research of Mellon and O'Hare was a more intuitive approach to SC in the early 1970s—namely, the development of whole-discourse exercises. These materials, much like Hunt's original rewriting tasks, consisted of semantically related kernels (or near-kernels) clustered into groups. The task for students was to combine a given cluster into different sentence options. Unlike the exercises researched by Mellon and O'Hare, these did not have prespecified right answers. Their whole point was to prompt decision making. Because combining occurred in a larger discourse context, some teachers came to see these exercises as rhetorically cued rather than grammatically cued.

Despite the differences between whole-discourse exercises and formats researched by O'Hare, their pedagogical claims are quite similar: that SC practice enhances sentence-making skills by drawing upon—and stimulating—a built-in linguistic competence. Put simply, SC provides for focused practice. A larger claim related to the rhetorical dimension: that increased syntactic fluency helps writers to generate ideas—first, by encouraging more details and depth of elaboration; and, second, by freeing up mental energy so that writers can focus on content.

I explore the basis for these claims in the next subsection. I also argue for a much broader definition of sentence combining.

Sentence Combining Defined

SC exercises come in different formats—both oral and written, "cued" and "open"—to accomplish a

variety of language development aims. But whatever their purpose or format, all seem to require some kind of language play. Like linguistic Rubik's cubes, they are *given language* that learners transform.

A typical cued SC exercise, using conventions popularized by Frank O'Hare, might look like this:

> Sentence combining is an approach.
>
> The approach is for teaching.
>
> Some teachers find ~~it~~ useful. (THAT)
>
> Others regard ~~it~~ as dangerous. (BUT)

The target sentence (or "write-out") for this problem puts four short sentences into one longer statement: *Sentence combining is a teaching approach that some teachers find useful but (that) others regard as dangerous.*

In the above example, four separate cues (or "signals") operate. The first is the sequencing of sentences to be combined. (Notice that the combining task becomes difficult, if not impossible, with any other ordering for the sentences.) The second cue is the underline beneath *teaching*, a signal to embed that word elsewhere. The third cue is the deletion signal—in this case, cross-out lines. The fourth cue is the connecting words—*that* and *but* respectively—shown in capital letters.

The same sentences could be presented with different cues:

> Sentence combining is an approach. (WHILE)
>
> The approach is for teaching.
>
> Some teachers find ~~it~~ useful. (THAT)
>
> Others regard it as dangerous.

The expected target sentence for this SC problem differs from the first example: *While sentence combining is an approach for teaching that some teachers find useful, others regard it as dangerous.*

Thus, cues can help students manipulate syntax in a fairly disciplined way. The aim of such practice is to work with transformations that may not be fully integrated into writing behavior. In the first example above, students who had not mastered parallel structure might be helped to internalize its rules. In the second example, students who had difficulty understanding concession clauses in argument might become more aware of this structure.

In contrast to cued SC, with "right answers" engineered through signals, "open" combining typically generates a *range* of grammatical responses. A typical open SC exercise might look like this:

> SC is a means to an end.
>
> The end is clear syntax.
>
> The end is controlled syntax.
>
> SC is not an end in itself.

Notice that this problem shows propositions in something other than kernel (reduced) form. That is, these sentences have already been somewhat transformed to make the problem more readable.

Here are a few possible solutions for the preceding exercise:

> SC is a means to an end, not an end in itself; that end is clear, controlled syntax.
>
> SC is a means to an end—clear syntax that is under control—and not an end in itself.
>
> Rather than being an end in itself, SC is a means to an end: syntactic control and clarity.

Obviously, many additional sentences, all equally grammatical though not equally effective, might be created. Perhaps you can think of a few.

The aim of open SC is to help students explore stylistic options. This approach assumes that groups of students can create many "right answers," consider their merits within a larger prose context, and make individual decisions. The rationale for this approach is nicely summarized by Peter Elbow (1985, 234)—certainly no apostle of SC exercises:

> When students must choose among acceptable options on the basis of trade-offs between competing advantages and disadvantages, they will almost inevitably make intuitive judgments *by ear*. Nothing could be more helpful and appropriate. We might be tempted to try to prevent this intuitive strategy—perhaps by constructing rules of thumb about certain constructions being better in certain conditions. But the study of language shows that people are in trouble if they have to operate by conscious rules. The ear, in the last analysis, is the most trustworthy and powerful organ for learning syntax; and fortunately it is easiest to teach—as long as we give some time to it.

Beyond these two approaches to SC are several others. Some use different forms of cues, including the cloze technique. Others rely on modeling and imitation. Still others require students to reorganize sentences and/or select relevant information from fact sheets. Then there are generative exercises to help students create their *own* details, recombining exercises based on the prose of

professional writers, and exercises focused on style and mechanics. In the Practice section, I provide examples of these different approaches.

But regardless of format, given-language interventions have a common aim: *to nudge students from an egocentric view of text to a "decentered" one.* Decentering enables us to hold language in short-term memory as it is being transcribed from either outer or inner speech. Moreover, decentering enables us to distance words from self—to hold a text at arm's length and read it imaginatively, as someone other than ourselves.

Fundamental to decentering is automaticity, a fluency with the encoding conventions of written syntax. Just as readers cannot concentrate on meaning until they "forget" about decoding, writers must have certain encoding basics under control to focus on content. Why? Because if attention is focused on how to make letters, spell words, or construct sentences, one cannot really *think* effectively.

However adept and facile the human brain may be, it cannot simultaneously focus on two quite different behaviors—one physiological, one psychological. Automaticity is required to "free up" cognitive space. This process has been described by Mellon (1981) as "two-channel thinking," an apt metaphor for a complex act.

Thus, the ultimate goal of SC training is to make sentence construction in writing more automatic, less labored. But at the same time, SC instruction aims to make students more conscious of sentence options because revision requires awareness. These two aims are complementary, not conflicting. Indeed, as automaticity increases, the ability to consider options—a decentering ability—does also.

I want to close this discussion of cued versus open exercises by observing that the term *sentence combining* is actually something of a misnomer. The phrase focuses on one mental activity—namely, putting sentences together. But given-language exercises need not be restricted to combining as narrowly defined. *Sentence revising* or *sentence relating* would better describe the exercises that invite learners to analyze, combine, select, rearrange, elaborate, organize, refocus, or edit.

I am arguing, then, for a broader conception of sentence combining—one that includes many mental activities, including "tightening" or "*de*combining." Merely making sentences longer hardly relates to the goals of writing instruction. It is important to remember that the goals of combining, as discussed above, are *increased automaticity* and *syntactic control.*

Exercises, both cued and open, can provide a class with instructional focus, a way of paying attention to language. But they will only be useful if students can *apply* what they are learning in real writing situations. To consider the issue of application, let's look at later research on SC.

Later Research on Sentence Combining

To say that SC has been a hot research area in recent years would be an understatement. As of October 1985, there were 80 citations in *Dissertation Abstracts* and 317 citations in the ERIC data base, all relating to some aspect of SC. Because of this large number, I can discuss only a few key studies here.

In his review of SC research, Charles Cooper (1975, 72) concluded that "no other single approach has ever consistently been shown to have a beneficial effect on syntactic maturity and writing quality." And James Ney provided a lively and helpful perspective in his 1980 article, "A Short History of Sentence Combining: Its Limitations and Use."

The research has examined the effects of SC on student writing performance at all educational levels—from second grade through adult education. The majority of studies indicate that SC promotes gains in syntactic fluency (or "maturity"). According to George Hillocks and Nancy Mavrogenes (Hillocks 1986, 142–43) about 60 percent of the studies report gains in fluency at $p < .05$ or better, with another 30 percent reporting varying levels of improvement.

These gains are sometimes less evident in the early grades, probably because students have not yet reached a decentering stage of cognitive development. A study by Patricia Rice (1983), based on data from 427 students in grades seven through eleven, indicates that SC practice over a ten-week period produces an average gain of 15 percentile points on measures of syntactic maturity.

Findings are mixed but encouraging when experimental and control groups are compared on the variable of writing quality. As a result of his meta-analysis, George Hillocks (1984, 161) concluded that "research shows sentence combining, on the average, to be more than twice as effective as free writing as a means of enhancing the quality of student writing."

On the other hand, SC is only about two-thirds as effective as an "inquiry" approach, according to Hillocks. (Inquiry is not a traditional study of prose models. Instead, this approach involves students "in finding and stating specific details that convey personal experience vividly, in examining sets of data to develop and support explanatory generalizations, or in analyzing situations that present ethical problems and in developing arguments about those situations" [1984, 161].)

Two weaknesses persist in much SC research. The first is duration of treatment. Some studies, using as few as ten or twelve hours of SC over several weeks of instruction, find no significant difference between experimental and control students on assessed writing quality. This should hardly be surprising since writing is a highly complex skill that takes time to learn, and measures of quality are less than precise. A study by Mary Ann Jones (1980) indicates that about twenty hours of SC instruction (over a ten-week period) are required for syntactic growth to reach its peak with college freshmen. Because no such data exist regarding writing quality, one can only trust common sense.

A second weakness of some SC research is that treatment conditions are very loose. Two key variables—the *type* of SC and the *process* for teaching it—often get surprisingly little attention. An inevitable consequence is conflicting results; but equally important, one cannot discern the types of materials and teaching approaches most likely to produce payoff. We should realize that SC is a context-specific approach, not one with fixed routines shared by all teachers. A simple procedure—introducing SC exercises and relating them to real writing—may have enormous impact on learning. Related to this point is the need for more *descriptive* research to examine stages that students go through in learning from SC.

Hillocks (1986) provides probably the best overview of more than fifty studies related to SC as part of a chapter entitled "Grammar and the Manipulation of Syntax." My review here deals with the effects of SC on writing quality, error, and syntactic fluency.

1. Sentence Combining and Writing Quality

Probably the best designed, best funded, and most carefully executed SC study to date is Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg (1978)—a study focused on freshman college students at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

In this research, 290 students were randomly assigned to six experimental and six control classes of comparable size. SAT and ACT scores indicated that the groups were of similar ability. Teachers for the two treatments were paired on age, rank, experience, commitment, and assessed teaching effectiveness. Students in both groups wrote eight papers at exactly the same points in the semester. For a pretest and a posttest, two comparable topics were devised, with half the students from each group writing on each topic.

Students in the experimental groups focused on whole-discourse SC in an open format as the exclusive content of the course. To supplement published materials (Strong 1973), the researchers created model exercises on various syntactic constructions. The emphasis was on controlled writing. In-class discussion centered on comparing responses to exercises done at home. The researchers stress that students were "consistently made aware of the writing options open to them and of the rhetorical reasons for choosing one pattern over another" (Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg 1978, 248).

Students in the control groups followed a solidly "mainstream" approach—namely, study of rhetoric, close reading of professional essays, and discussion of student papers. Teachers followed a departmental syllabus that emphasized modes of writing and its elements. Textbooks for the course included two perennial bestsellers, *The Harbrace Reader* and James McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose*. This treatment allotted time for introducing assignments and evaluating student papers.

The Miami study showed significant gains in syntactic fluency for students in the experimental groups. But far more interesting to writing teachers was the qualitative comparison of papers, using forced-choice, holistic, and analytic methods. Papers were coded and mixed so that experienced teacher-readers could not tell whether they were reading pretest or posttest, experimental or control. Interrater reliabilities on the analytic and holistic measures ranged from .82 to .86.

Results indicate that students in the SC treatment were writing significantly better papers than their control counterparts—at least as trained teachers judge "better" under closely monitored conditions. In fact, the confidence level for the comparison between experimental and control groups

turned out to be .001 on the holistic measure—far higher than the .05 and .01 levels generally accepted in educational research. The analytic measure showed significant differences, in favor of experimental groups, on five of six criteria (Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg 1978, 250–52).

Even the toughest SC critics found this data somewhat persuasive. The researchers suggest that "in addition to those qualities stressed in the SC classes—sentence structure, supporting details, and voice—the experimental group significantly outgained the control group even in the qualities especially cultivated in the conventional classes—ideas and diction and usage" (255).

Yet in all silver clouds there is a dark lining. For the Miami study, it was a delayed posttest—two years after the treatment—showing no significant difference between experimental and control students on either the syntactic fluency or writing quality measures (Kerek, Daiker, and Morenberg 1980). Earlier SC research by Combs (1977) and Pedersen (1977) had indicated that seventh graders retained their gains in fluency and quality for several weeks. The Miami results suggest that gains eventually eroded.

All of this may confirm what some researchers have hypothesized: that either the gains for SC students are temporary learning "spikes" or that control students catch up. Addressing this issue, the Miami researchers noted that the SC students had not regressed. Still, it had to be acknowledged that differences between experimental and control groups were negligible after two years—a point that lent support to Mellon's (1981) distinction between *maturity* (the cause) and *fluency* (the observed behavior).

For elementary and middle-school teachers, two studies are of special interest. In one study, Deurelle McAfee (1980) randomly assigned fifty fifth graders to experimental and control groups. Over a six-week period, the experimental group received SC treatment for forty-five minutes (half of the language arts block), while control students followed their regular program. The SC treatment consisted not only of sentence manipulation but also the writing of paragraphs and stories; moreover—and this is important—SC materials were prepared in part *from texts* used by both groups. Measures included the Test of Reading Comprehension, the Test of Written Language, and pretest/posttest writing samples. Results indicate that SC students achieved significant gains over their control-group counterparts in reading achievement, written language scores, and freewriting.

A second study by Elizabeth Stoddard (1982) explored the effect of SC and creative thinking activities on the writing ability of gifted fifth- and sixth-grade students. In a six-week study involving 180 students in four school districts, Stoddard tested the effect of two SC treatments—SC plus creativity exercises versus SC only—against regular programs for gifted education. Pretest and posttest writing samples were judged holistically and were also given subscores on creativity. Results showed that both treatment groups scored significantly higher on syntactic fluency and overall writing quality than control-group students. Students who received SC plus creativity work scored higher on the creativity measures than those who received SC only.

In recent years, three high school studies have produced mixed results, much like research in the 1970s. Using intact classes at four grade levels, Carl Hendrickson (1981) compared SC treatment (one day per week) against regular writing instruction over five months. Results were mixed on both fluency and writing quality measures. In a semester-long study with twelve intact classes of ninth and tenth graders, Lawrence Daker (1980) found that experimental groups achieved significantly higher scores on all fluency measures, but did not outperform control groups on writing quality or reduced writing apprehension. And in a seven-week study with three intact ninth-grade classes, Brenda Bruno (1980) set up two experimental conditions—the first SC, the second direct writing practice (both for two days a week)—against in-class reading as a control. Both experimental conditions produced significant gains in syntactic fluency and writing quality.

Support for the effect of SC on writing skills is found not only in English education studies but also in foreign-language research. In a study that compared SC with conventional language instruction (Cooper, Morain, and Kalivorda 1980), researchers divided 325 college students enrolled in intermediate French, German, and Spanish classes into three experimental and three control groups, all using the same texts. Experimental groups received the same modified audio-lingual instruction as their control counterparts but practiced SC and did fewer

reading selections. Results support the claim that regular, sequenced SC speeds up the acquisition of writing skills and enables students to use more complex transformations.

For SC theory, the fact that exercises work in contexts other than the English classroom is very important. It suggests that an internalized, intuitive competence in a language is not necessarily a prerequisite for success with the approach. (Of perhaps equal interest to foreign-language teachers is that researchers sequenced a large number of SC exercises in order of increasing difficulty as part of their report; see Cooper, Morain, and Kalivorda 1980.)

2. Sentence Combining and Syntactic Error

Error analysis is a politically important but murky topic for writing teachers. In the minds of many school patrons, writing quality is synonymous with error-free papers. One might hypothesize that increased syntactic control, a goal of informed SC practice, would transfer to proofreading and editing skills. "If sentence-combining practice really accomplishes what we expect," write Elaine Maimon and Barbara Nodine, "students will finally become proficient enough in sentence manipulation so that their errors will decrease, although not disappear" (1979, 101).

But in actual practice with college freshmen, Maimon and Nodine (1978) found that matters were not so clear-cut. Their first study, on the effects of SC over a seven-month treatment, showed conflicting data about embedding errors as students wrote longer, more complex sentences. These errors included faulty subject-verb agreement, dangling verbal phrases, misplaced modifiers, sentence fragments, vague pronoun reference, faulty parallelism, and comma splices or run-on sentences.

Students combined sentences on Hunt's famous "Aluminum Passage" (1977) for both pretest and posttest. On this measure they showed an increase of 2.79 words per T-unit (a measure of length with more precision than the notion of "sentence"). At the same time errors increased by 4.36 words per T-unit. Students also wrote pretest and posttest essays on a personal, expository topic, "selecting a friend for lunch." These papers showed the expected increase in words per T-unit. However, unlike the results for the aluminum passage posttest, errors per T-unit showed a 5.86 *decline* (Maimon and Nodine 1978).

In a follow-up study, Maimon and Nodine (1979) looked at the same students one year later. Their general purpose was to examine the long-term effects of SC practice on T-units and on the number of embedding errors. More particularly, they looked at two writing tasks—a paraphrase and a response to a moral dilemma. Solving the dilemma was the more difficult task of the two.

The results show that syntactic fluency had *not* eroded—an effect the researchers attributed to across-the-curriculum writing practice. Also, students made fewer errors (with longer T-units) on the paraphrase task and more errors (with shorter T-units) on the moral dilemma assignment. Finally, the results confirm that as cognitive demands increase, so does error. One year later, students were in the same error range.

Other studies exploring SC and error have also produced conflicting results. In a study of basic writers in a community college, Joyce Powell (1984) concluded that SC appeared to reduce errors over a sixteen-week period. Macey McKee (1982) also reported positive results (increased syntactic maturity and decreased error) in an eight-week study with college-bound ESL students. But with remedial eleventh-grade writers, using twenty-six lessons over one semester, Ira Hayes (1984) found that SC was no more effective than regular instruction. Lottie Guttry (1982) concluded after a fifteen-week study that SC was only as effective as grammar instruction in remediating errors of community college freshmen. And in a ten-week study focused on error reduction—one day of SC treatment followed by four days of regular instruction—Kathy Jackson (1982) concluded that SC does not reduce the syntactic errors made by basic writers.

A study by Rebecca Argall (1982) relates to these findings. Argall asked whether SC practice, when tied specifically to the needs of basic writers, might reduce errors. Her sample consisted of nineteen developmental writing students at the freshman level. "When freed from the pressure of having to create content," Argall reasoned, "students can give full attention to sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics and perhaps be taught to detect deviations from standard usage and syntactic boundaries" (3).

Her goal, it should be noted, was not to increase sentence length or maturity. Rather, she aimed for

"a greatly reduced incidence of the structural errors that are common to developmental writers, especially garbling errors and errors resulting from failure to recognize and punctuate sentence boundaries" (4).

Students were given five weeks of intensive SC, with no other instruction or writing practice. The treatment focused on structures used in the students' placement essays, with punctuation taught functionally in context. Students learned structural terms so that they had a common vocabulary for discussing sentences in class.

One of Argall's pretest/posttest measures consisted of four exercises—two of which were student paragraphs—that the class proofread and corrected. Between pretest and posttest, she tallied and classified their corrections without marking their papers. She then gave these papers to students on the posttest, with the general instruction to proofread and revise.

The results were dramatic: a 100 percent decrease in garbled sentences, a 21 percent decrease in comma splices, a 31 percent decrease in sentence fragments, a 67 percent decrease in fused sentences, a 34 percent decrease in sentence boundary errors, and a 14 percent decrease in comma errors. The only error to increase was problems with the use of the semicolon—up 76 percent—to confirm Mina Shaughnessy's observation that this problem becomes "epidemic" when the semicolon is first introduced to basic writers (Argall 1982, 6–7).

Argall's second measure was a pretest/posttest comparison of student writing—this to address the question of transfer. Her results were again heartening: a 100 percent decrease in garbled sentences, a 24 percent decrease in comma splices, a 63 percent decrease in sentence fragments, a 43 percent decrease in fused sentences, a 38 percent decrease in sentence boundary errors, and a 47 percent decrease in comma errors. Not only that, but no semicolon errors appeared in posttest papers (7–8).

Some people will dismiss such results as yet another instance of the Hawthorne effect, in which the subject's knowledge that he or she is the object of special attention causes unanticipated but beneficial results. This judgment is valid from one frame of reference, outrageous from another. After all, what *is* good teaching if not a series of "biasing effects" that we hope will result in student learning? My claim—an expression of faith, really—is that similar results can be achieved by *any* good teacher who focuses instruction and integrates activities as Argall did.

While Argall's study may not be elegant in methodology or in statistical analysis, it shows convincingly the difference that one hard-working teacher can make. I want to emphasize that Argall did not expect SC to do the teaching. She reserved that task for herself. SC was merely a tool—a means to an end—and she used it to build bridges for students, taking them from where they were in writing to a more literate landscape.

So my first summary comment regarding these studies of error is that they confirm common sense. To achieve any educational aim with SC requires goal setting and perseverance. Positive results are neither accidental nor automatic—nor are they achieved overnight—yet they can and do happen everyday when good teachers know what they are doing and why.

My second comment is that error analyses conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1975 and 1981) provide us with a healthy perspective. The truth of the matter is quite simple: (1) as we move up the developmental ladder of syntax acquisition—trying new things with words—we solve some problems but also move into *new* errors; (2) as our minds focus on more difficult cognitive tasks, the likelihood for error escalates; and (3) as our need to shape and edit writing grows because of real communication aims, so does our mastery of the "basics."

3. The Syntactic Fluency Hypothesis

Given the earlier discussion of signaled and open SC, you may wonder what research has to say about the relative merits of these formats. H. Kaye Henderson (1980) addressed this question in a study of average tenth-grade writers. She tested each format under two conditions—over twelve weeks and over twenty-four weeks, with four separate groups.

Henderson concluded that a signaled format promotes greater gains in the number of clauses per T-unit but that an open format promotes more nonclausal embedding. A second finding was that open exercises appeared to promote more improvement in overall writing quality. Finally, Henderson noted that an "intensified" time frame (one hour per week for twelve weeks) was better than an "ex-

tended" time frame (one-half hour per week for twenty-four weeks) for promoting transfer to students' own writing.

Having warmed to the topic, I now need to discuss an assumption that has governed much SC research: that gains in syntactic fluency—the variety and complexity of sentences—somehow relate to judgments about writing quality. Put in its simplest terms, the hidden argument for the Syntactic Fluency Hypothesis goes something like this:

1. Skilled writers produce quality writing.
2. One evidence of writing skill is syntactic fluency.
3. Therefore, gains in syntactic fluency lead to quality writing.

The fallacy of such reasoning lies in the obvious fact that syntactic fluency is only *one* skill possessed by skilled writers.

The Syntactic Fluency Hypothesis has been seductive for two reasons. First, T-units, words per clause, and other transformational features are relatively easy to count. Because they offer descriptive precision, it is only reasonable that they should be used when looking at writing. Second, because gains in syntactic fluency correlated with "better" writing in some SC research, there was a temptation to conclude that fluency had *caused* the quality gains.

To mistake correlation for causation is, of course, a dangerous logical fallacy. In this case, it led some people to conclude that quality writing is necessarily comprised of complex sentences and that making longer sentences is the route to better writing.

Joseph Williams (1979, 597–98) summarized the practical concerns of many writing instructors regarding the Syntactic Fluency Hypothesis:

> Most [sentence-combining researchers] have simply assumed that bigger is better. . . . [But] every program that attempts to teach adults how to write . . . concentrates on the ways that those adults can write less complex, simpler clauses; not longer, but shorter sentences. Every such program attempts specifically to undo what sentence combiners specifically want to do.

To buttress this assertion, Hake and Williams (1985) conducted an experiment that compared sentence imitation to SC with tenth- and eleventh-grade students of varying ability. In the course of their study, they learned three things about the relationship of sentence length to writing ability:

> First, students who originally did not meet the threshold of competence, but who improved, shortened their T-units. Second, students who originally did not meet the threshold of competence, and who did not improve, lengthened their T-units. Third, students who originally did meet the threshold of competence, and who remained competent, lengthened their T-units (87).

Hake and Williams cite studies by Stephen Witte (1983a) and Susan Miller (1980) as essentially confirming the view that shorter sentences, not longer ones, characterize "better writing." (This key point is discussed later in this Theory and Research section under Instructional Issues 3 and 4.)

Despite practical and theoretical challenges to the Syntactic Fluency Hypothesis, this assumption continues to dominate SC research. This fact has led Michael Holzman (1983, 74) to charge that SC studies are preoccupied with "scientism"—"the practice of the forms of science for their own sake, or for the sake of wearing those gorgeous cloaks over a poor reality." Putting the matter less elegantly, I would say that the Syntactic Fluency Hypothesis promotes confusion about means and ends in writing instruction.

This is not to say that research on syntactic fluency has been trivial. By providing descriptions of surface features, such studies help us to see writing developmentally, adding to our knowledge of text and shaping how we view language. This process is part of our evolution, both personally and professionally. Imagine James Moffett's notions for a student-centered language arts curriculum if devoid of their psycholinguistic foundations. A "growth" metaphor now controls our thinking about language.

But Stephen Witte (1983b), among others, has seriously questioned the reliability of mean T-unit length, one of the key measures used by SC researchers. The assumption has been that this measure remains fairly stable (in a given mode of writing) for an individual student, but Witte found great variability for individuals. Moreover, variability increased as the mode changed. Thus, because of the measures used, Witte challenges the reliability of SC research.

So the point is to ask the "so what?" question of SC studies, particularly those emphasizing gains in

syntactic fluency. This repeated question—polite but firm—will surely help researchers to think more deeply about the reliability of their measures and to clarify the relationship of fluency to writing quality. To address this question, SC research will necessarily move into the ethnographic arena and will also deal with cohesion analysis, relating cohesive ties to writing quality. The effect will be to reduce the means/end confusion related to syntactic fluency.

4. Sentence-Combining Research in Perspective

Before considering the current debate over SC in the writing class, I want to summarize what I think the research says, outline some possibilities for future studies, and stress that the decision to use (or avoid) SC is more likely to be governed by beliefs about writing instruction than by research findings. Just as many teachers persist in teaching grammar despite research evidence to the contrary, other teachers will eschew SC even though its track record is at least modestly impressive, particularly when compared to other interventions.

In my opinion, this state of affairs has nothing to do with human perversity and everything to do with the selectivity of our perceptions. To say it directly: When it comes to teaching decisions, most of us trust our instincts, not the *t* tests from someone else's classroom. As Theodore Roethke put it, "We think by feeling." Given the complexity of writing instruction and the fact that teaching remains an art and not a science, such "filtering" seems highly intelligent. If sensitive, well-meaning teachers cannot be trusted to sort out what makes sense for students, who can?

Let me now list what I regard as the key findings from the SC research cited earlier. Obviously, this summary is also "filtered" selectively:

1. The evidence strongly suggests that SC promotes gains in syntactic fluency. For students in the elementary and middle grades, growth in syntactic fluency will probably contribute to better writing over the long term. However, syntactic fluency is only one aspect of writing development and most likely not the most important one. Moreover, gains in fluency can probably be promoted by naturalistic alternatives to SC—for example, asking students to consolidate class notes into sentence form, assume authoritative personas on writing tasks, and write for real-world audiences other than the teacher. It seems most unlikely that the ability to make longer or more deeply embedded sentences would in and of itself result in measurably better writing across the broad spectrum of developmental levels.
2. The evidence provides only moderate support for the claim that SC instruction produces qualitative improvement in student writing. While a number of studies support the SC hypothesis, other studies have produced nonsignificant results. Moreover, while the meta-analysis conducted by Hillocks (1984) showed SC to be more effective than a number of other approaches, it also showed SC to be less effective than an inquiry approach. The research suggests that SC is likely to be more effective in the intermediate and middle grades than in the high school years. College-level research provides tentative support for SC in two contexts—namely, assisting basic writers and ESL students, and providing working models of rhetorical and stylistic principles in regular classrooms.
3. The evidence seems very mixed regarding the effects of SC on syntactic error. While a few studies support the hypothesis that SC helps students gain control of syntax and thereby reduce surface errors, a number of studies indicate otherwise. It seems improbable that SC instruction in itself would result in reduced error; indeed, just the reverse might reasonably be predicted over the short term. What appears essential, particularly for basic writing and ESL instruction, is that SC be tied clearly and specifically to the assessed needs of students. Moreover, it seems clear that SC must be of sufficient intensity and duration—that is, related to the real writing of students for a concentrated time—in order for students to internalize its lessons.

As for "bottom line" questions—for example, the long-term effects of SC or the relative power of SC treatments—very little research exists. To date, the only study to address the long-term effects of SC is that of Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg (1978)—a study that did not support the SC hypothesis. The only work to address the relative effects of SC treatments is Henderson (1980)—a study supporting the hypothesis that open SC produces more qualitative

gains in writing (with high school students) than signaled SC. If SC is to come of age as a viable adjunct to writing instruction, such questions must receive further research.

Viewed in its totality, SC research is remarkable for having pursued the same questions, particularly those related to syntactic fluency, so doggedly. One has to wonder whether researchers are reading the background literature thoroughly before proposing yet another study that uses syntactic indexes as dependent variables. Are such indexes part of a received standard paradigm for SC research? If so, why? Could it be partly, as one graduate student in ESL recently confided, that the counting of syntactic features is straightforward and "do-able"—an expedient solution to the problem of getting an advanced degree?

I have already mentioned the need for descriptive studies to pursue the question of how learners interact with SC exercises. Many research angles are possible: How do learners approach SC as a mental task? What behaviors are in evidence as they process tasks of varying difficulty? What moves do learners make in assimilating more complex transformations into their repertoire? How much oral rehearsal is necessary before transformations appear in SC writing tasks and in real writing? And so on.

The shift in emphasis that I am proposing parallels what Jerome Bruner (1983) describes in his autobiography, *In Search of Mind*. He writes that because psychology was utterly dominated by behavioral and positivist viewpoints during the first half of the twentieth century, "the basic trick was to state your findings in centimeters, grams, or seconds" (107). But Bruner and George Miller wanted to study *thinking*—just as today's researchers want to study *writing*. So the problem was to be objective in a new way:

> Could one devise thinking tasks that were both challengingly complex and at the same time amenable to . . . informational analysis . . . ? Could we not control the amount of input of information we gave our subjects and then examine their uptake of it as revealed by their hypotheses or their subsequent acts? We might then know something more about such things as the natural order in which information can be most useful, how much redundancy is needed, what kinds of information are crucial at what points, and so on. We might, indeed, ask very qualitative questions in a quite quantifiable way. That, after all, is what a good research method should do for you. (113)

There is much for SC researchers to think about here.

I have also alluded to text cohesion as a possible SC research angle for the future. We already know a good deal about the development of syntactic fluency. Do similar "stages" exist beyond the level of individual sentences? That is, do learners grow in their ability to make cohesive ties across sentence boundaries? Could measures such as Hunt and O'Donnell's syntactic maturity tests be adapted for study of cohesion? Further, is not the cohesiveness of text more closely related to quality than the length and complexity of sentences? If so, why not count what matters—namely, various cohesive ties?

Beneath the surface of these questions—rhetorical as they may be—lurks a hypothesis: that perceptions of writing quality are mainly governed by perceptions of coherence, and that coherence is mainly, but not entirely, a function of explicit linguistic ties (or *cohesion*). I recognize, of course, that text coherence is also influenced by contextual factors, such as the reader's prior knowledge and the pragmatics of the rhetorical situation. Still, the semantic links in text should not be overlooked by empirically oriented SC researchers focused on qualitative issues.

As for those interested in the effects of rhetorical intention on text decisions, why not explore how writers adapt given-language exercises to differing audiences and purposes? Lester Faigley's work (1979, 1985—described in subsection 18 of the Practice section) presents an imaginative approach that deserves further study, particularly in high school and college classes.

A final set of research questions pertains to the "scaffolding" potential of certain SC formats. "Scaffold" refers to the teaching support provided in a learning context. To those interested in computer-assisted, interactive SC, there is an intriguing possible analogue between oral prompts (such as exaggeration, emphasis, pointing, and modeling that parents use to shape children's speech) and written prompts that might support the learning of writing. Scaffolding for writing would encourage text elaboration, thus helping the learner generate language and move from "old" to "new" information.

I have recently completed a one-month field test with two classes of seventh graders on just such an interactive program. Unlike conventional SC, this program consists of ten interlocking (print) lessons, each a chapter in an adventure story called "The

Fire." Each chapter is an SC exercise with two levels of scaffolding; the first consists of prompts (directions and questions) and hints (sentence starters), and the second consists of directed questions to help students complete the chapter. See activity 1 for a sample lesson from this program.

Students composed their stories for real audiences of second and fourth graders. Typical class sessions focused on oral SC, then on brainstorming and discussion, with students working independently as the regular teacher and I conferred with individuals. Peer response groups—for text revision and editing—were also part of the class structure.

Data from students' texts, opinionnaires, and posttest interviews suggest that scaffolding helped many average and below-average writers. In general, these students had relatively little writing experience, had limited notions of the structural conventions of fiction, and often had difficulty with basic English skills. They did not generally define themselves as writers, but they tended to see the interactive format as interesting and useful. According to their teacher, the program helped them to write more sustained, higher-quality stories than would otherwise have been the case.

The program was less successful, however, with above-average and gifted students—those who already defined themselves as writers. Many of these students showed restlessness as the lessons progressed; these feelings were confirmed by posttest measures. For above-average students in general, scaffolding seemed an intrusion. Some reacted to it with uninspired writing, others with exaggeration or parody. In short, many apparently saw the scaffolding as a kind of write-by-numbers activity, one that could not sustain their interest or involvement.

While I hesitate to draw conclusions from a preliminary field test, I can now raise questions for further inquiry: (1) At what age or developmental level is such an approach most useful? (2) What happens when learners receive lessons 1 and 10 initially (or all lessons at once) so that global prewriting can occur? (3) What are the effects of team planning and collaborative writing upon writing and attitudes? (4) What happens when learners receive lessons in random (or unnumbered) fashion so that "jigsaw" learning becomes necessary? (5) How can the structural problems of interactive SC be minimized and "ownership" increased?

In summary, SC research needs to become both more rigorous in its methodology and more imaginative in its approach. If research can do no more than document what good teachers do with SC, it will make an important contribution.

The Great Debate over Sentence Combining

So where does all of this ongoing scholarship leave teachers of writing? Is SC a sure-fire, double-your-money-back panacea for all that ails the English classroom? Is it simply a flash-in-the-pan gimmick for keeping students at their desks—a sweetener to make the bitter pill of grammar go down? Or is it something in between these extremes? Let's consider the pedagogical debate over SC.

To thoughtful critics such as William Michael Kleine (1983), SC instruction should play a *minimal* role in the writing classroom. In his dissertation, "Syntactic Choice and a Theory of Discourse: Rethinking Sentence Combining," Kleine argues that SC approaches, at least as generally used, cannot result in significant cognitive change and growth, the "bottom line" of writing instruction.

Kleine says that SC exercises provide a covert and temporary cue to "write longer sentences." But such cues, according to Kleine, do not really engage "the schemata and conceptual hierarchies" of students (239). In other words, because students typically transform *given language*, their minds are not processing meanings—*their* meanings—in any substantive way. Students merely finger the syntactic surface of prose.

While Kleine does acknowledge that SC may help skill-deficient students acquire more control and self-confidence when writing, he insists that exercises should be peripheral to real work in composition. Exercises that are used should emphasize syntactic choice in writing that students are actually *doing*, not planning to do. To Kleine, this means "generative" SC problems, each very brief, and each requiring that students create part of the propositional content. Kleine echoes Lester Faigley in urging that these cued, generative exercises emphasize constructions such as the cumulative sentence. Part of Kleine's conclusion is that whole-discourse exercises—the kind used in the Miami experiment—should probably be scrapped (240).

Like Kleine, Peter Elbow (1985) also has reservations about SC. He notes that exercises can help, much as in the learning of a musical instrument; but his concern is a basic one:

> In sentence combining, the student is not engaged in figuring out what she wants to say or saying what

ACTIVITY 1

Chapter 7: The Fisherman
(Making Participial Phrases)

1.1 The fisherman glanced at his campfire.
1.2 The fisherman saw what had happened.

What did the fisherman realize?

He realized that . . .
His carelessness had . . .
Sparks from his campfire . . .

2.1 Fire now swept toward his tent.
2.2 Fire moved like an incoming tide.

Show how the flames looked like water.

Ripples of flame . . .
Flames washed forward . . .
A wave of flame lapped . . .

3.1 The man headed toward the tent.
3.2 The man looked very frantic.

Describe the man's appearance.

His eyes were . . .
He blinked and . . .
His face was pinched . . .

4.1 The fisherman tugged at the poles.
4.2 He tried to dismantle the tent.

What did Lisa do to help?

Lisa undid the . . .
Lisa held the tent as . . .
Lisa stamped flames that . . .

5.1 Then Lisa kicked at the stakes.
5.2 Then Lisa knocked them loose.

What did Lisa say about the fire?

"Hurry, it's . . ."
"Quick, let's . . ."
"The fire's coming . . ."

6.1 Fire chased them to the trail.
6.2 Fire licked at their heels.

What did they drag behind them?

They dragged . . .
The two of them . . .
Dragging the tent . . .

Finishing Chapter 7

Reread your chapter so far. Then start a prewriting map to generate ideas. Use the firefighters as your focus.

Step 1: Think about these questions: How did Tony try to keep fire out of the underbrush? What was Lisa's idea about using the tarp beneath the tent?

Step 2: Imagine a frantic exchange between Lisa and the fisherman about fighting the fire. To advance the story smoothly, weave this conversation into the action.

Step 3: Create a sentence such as this one to end Chapter 7: "The tarp!" Lisa called to Tony. "Try to get it!"

> is on her mind. And because it provides prepackaged words and ready-made thoughts, sentence combining reinforces the push-button, fast-food expectations in our culture. As a result the student is not saying anything to anyone: The results of her work are more often "answers" given to the teacher for correction—not "writing" given to readers for reactions. (233)

Elbow recommends that SC, as commonly used, "take up no more than a small part of any writing course." He sees some value in open exercises because they "face students with an array of acceptable answers—as writing does." But his worry is that exercises—because they are "clearer, simpler, and more coherent than writing"—may gradually receive too much emphasis in a writing class. "The better and more fruitful the exercise," Elbow says, "the worse the danger" (233–35).

In the opposite corner of the debate, although they are certainly not wild-eyed zealots for SC, are respected teacher-researchers such as Richard Gebhardt, Marion Crowhurst, and John Mellon. Gebhardt (1985) contends that SC helps students "to monitor words when writing"—a vitally important skill—and that it builds up their capacity "to handle the simultaneous demands of producing, reading, judging, and modifying words" (211).

SC also prompts students to "chunk" information, thus reducing cognitive overload, according to Gebhardt. Gebhardt claims (disagreeing with Kleine) that SC "seems to help students learn skills and habits of abstracting and generalizing, of isolating meaning in kernels, deducing logical connections between kernels, and of compressing and blending meaning and logic from several kernels into a more compact unit with the same meaning" (212).

Marion Crowhurst (1983) argues that we should maintain realistic expectations for SC.

> Since composing is a complex act involving many skills, it is not to be expected that a few months' sentence combining will automatically produce a general improvement in writing quality. Sometimes, however, an improvement may be noted . . . due, partially, to increased practice in writing sentences during sentence combining, partially to greater facility in constructing sentences, and partially to the fact that increased skill in constructing sentences releases energy for other aspects of composing. Quality improvements are most likely to result if substantial time is spent on open, rather than cued, exercises, on whole discourse problems, and on discussing the rhetorical effect of the various versions produced. (69–70)

And, finally, John Mellon (1979, 33–35) contends that "the time for action has arrived." According to Mellon, "sentence combining produces no negative effects, and works better than most of the activities in current composition teaching." Because he knows of no method that has better empirical support, he recommends a mix of cued single-sentence problems (two per day on the average) and open whole-discourse exercises followed by discussion (two per week). Mellon says that "the best advice I can give teachers today, relative to sentence combining, is—Do it!"

Obviously, the conclusions of Gebhardt, Crowhurst, and Mellon differ from those of Kleine and Elbow. Obviously, too, each of us must decide for ourselves. My own conclusion is that while SC is often a helpful intervention, it simply cannot teach certain key aspects of the writing process.

Like Crowhurst, I believe that we should maintain reasonable expectations for SC. On the other hand, I do not think we should be content with the structure, interaction, or payoff of conventional SC. By looking for new ways to use materials productively and by being very fussy in selecting exercises or in designing our own, we may well find ourselves thinking *beyond* the current debate over SC. Toward that end, I want to mention three viewpoints on language and writing development.

The first is that of Joan Tough (1977), who learned that linguistically facile children, when given a picture to describe, begin with a global, holistic perspective and "work down" to elaborated particulars. Less linguistically adept children, on the other hand, simply label particulars, use generalized pronouns and nonelaborated phrases, and need prompts to articulate further. The question raised by this work is, *Can SC simulate—and stimulate—the vital strategy of "framing" followed by elaboration?*

The second perspective is that of Walter Loban (1976), who learned in his longitudinal (K–12) study that the ability to manipulate sentence parts characterized successful language users. Less-able students seemed constrained not so much by "deficits" of vocabulary or intelligence as by syntactic/semantic straitjackets, a reluctance to rework their writing. The question this study raises: *Can SC facilitate linguistic play that transfers to skill in writing?*

The third perspective is that of Alexander Luria (1977–78, 113), who says of his descriptive research on writing development: "It is not understanding that generates the act [of writing], but far more the

act that gives birth to understanding—indeed the act often far precedes understanding." Like Vygotsky, Luria points to activity *in* writing as a key to its symbolic potential. The question raised by his work: *Can SC activity help trigger metalinguistic understanding?*

So much for challenges that SC has yet to face up to. Now, to help clarify terms of the basic debate over SC, I explore seven key issues of immediate importance.

Seven Instructional Issues

As I have tried to show, informed researchers have deep differences of opinion about SC. In this section I deal more specifically with issues that have yet to be resolved in the minds of many teachers. Mindful of George Miller's classic essay that establishes the "magic number seven" (plus or minus two) as an outer limit for human memory (Miller 1956), I limit myself, mercifully, to that number of points. Several ideas discussed here are considered more fully in the Practice section.

1. Technique in Search of a Rationale

To many, SC is a technique (or application) that is devoid of real theory, either linguistic or pedagogical. Stephen Krashen (1984, 1) puts it this way: "Transformational grammar . . . is a wonderful theory of language structure. It is not, however, a theory of language acquisition and is an inappropriate basis for writing methodology."

In other words, no one really *believes* that real writers first create lists of short sentences and then combine them; and few experienced teachers would publicly assert that exercises tap the same skills as writing in process. If conventional SC exercises *are* useful, it is probably to simulate what goes on as writers revise and edit. But working with chunks of language so as to delimit, expand, or rearrange meanings is only part of a much larger process, as any writer knows.

A possible rationale for SC might conceptualize the writing process as two simultaneous but separate acts—one physiological, one psychological (Strong 1985a). Let's consider such an idea in relation to SC exercises.

Writing as a *physiological* act would refer to the left-to-right unfolding of sentences in space. Skill in this domain would involve holding chunks of meaning in short-term memory, "hearing" inner speech, and then transcribing.

Given these assumptions, the rationale for SC would emphasize deliberate training on this physiological level. It would relate such training to classical approaches of *imitation*—the emulation of prose models—and cite the advice of many skilled writers—namely, that paying attention to prose informs one's development in powerful ways. SC would be defined as an *interactive* form of sentence imitation and exploration, one that depends on language play and immediate feedback.

Writing as a *psychological* act would refer to the creation of discourse structures, the plans and decisions we make in telling stories, writing poems, or composing essays. Skill in this domain would depend on how one attends to variables such as subject, audience, and purpose.

A possible SC rationale based on this premise would suggest that certain exercises, by virtue of their built-in logic and organization, can heighten awareness of mental "moves" in writing. Among these moves would be strategies as diverse as general-to-specific paragraphing, comparison/contrast, use of transitions, and relating old and new information. The rationale would emphasize that making these moves in a controlled way provides a basis for parallel (real) writing.

The psychological rationale for SC would also note that writers look ahead and back as they shape their texts, relying on what Sondra Perl (1983, 45–46) calls a "felt sense" to guide composing. Predicting and reflecting behaviors can be somewhat simulated—and coached—as students cover up portions of whole-discourse exercises and guess what comes next on the basis of already-combined sentences.

2. Sentence Combining versus Real Writing

Many teachers share James Moffett's reservations that exercises—or "dummy runs"—are difficult to justify on any grounds other than expediency. Because SC exercises are not usually drawn from the students' real writing or from ongoing class activities, they might be construed as a new kind of "busywork curriculum," different from traditional grammar drills yet sharing many of their weaknesses.

Foremost among these weaknesses, surely, would be that SC requires students to manipulate language but not to *use* it in personally meaningful

ways. SC seems especially vulnerable on this point, as we have already noted.

One of Moffett's main assertions in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (1968, 72) is that "interaction is a more important process than imitation, whatever the age of the learner." Because people use words to achieve human purposes, Moffett says, real language learning cannot be divorced from these ends. Complexity in syntax is a means to qualify our thoughts, but to focus on elaboration apart from human aims is to confuse the issue: "Syntactic complexity is no virtue in itself, surely" (171). For Moffett, the naturalistic alternatives to SC include "sentence expansion games, good discussion, rewriting of notes, collaborative revision of compositions, playing with one-sentence discourses, and verbalizing certain cognitive tasks" (78).

At issue is the distinction between "interactive" and "imitative" learning. I agree with Moffett's assertion that relegates imitation to a subsidiary role in language learning. But I contend that interaction is very much an eye-of-the-beholder phenomenon. An imitation exercise can be highly interactive if the learner *perceives* it as useful, important, and engaging. What is really at stake is helping students see connections between skill-building work and real writing.

Creating SC from student prose (or from reading materials) is an important first step in promoting transfer of learning. Specifying situational contexts (situation, purpose, audience) also helps to make SC more functional and interesting. And setting up parallel writing tasks for the application of target skills is a third practical way to create connections.

In short, I cannot discount what teachers report about the effects of SC: that it provides a "self-teaching" focus for language study and helps some students to take syntactic and conceptual risks in real writing. Such "kid-watching" reports, as Patrick Hartwell and Gene LoPresti (1985) call them, are important.

With characteristic directness, John Mellon (1979, 30) makes roughly the same point in a different way: "I have yet to hear reports of student boredom in connection with sentence combining, and when I do I'm reasonably certain the cause will be *teacher* apathy."

Just as a flight simulator is not real flying, SC exercises are certainly not real writing. The question is whether "dummy runs" have any legitimate value. In my opinion, the answer depends on how learners view what we have them do.

3. Growth in Sentence-Making Skills

A basic aim of intelligent SC work is to make good sentences, not merely long ones. It follows, then, that "decombining" may be at least as important as putting sentences together. Recall, for example, the criticism of Joseph Williams (1979) regarding SC research, and James Moffett's (1968) remarks about syntactic complexity.

An emphasis on merely combining sentences seems simpleminded, even perverse. Indeed, for secondary and college teachers who spend much of their lives trying to untangle confused, unwieldy, overly complex prose, such an aim seems educationally laughable. After all, why exacerbate the problem? Common sense would suggest that we point students in the opposite direction—toward lean, direct sentences, not toward longer ones.

And indeed we should. But as in so many other matters of language education, "the readiness is all." It is important to remember that the tightening of language is a later psycholinguistic stage than clause expansion. So, while decombining practice makes great sense in upper high school grades and in college classrooms where students are developmentally on track, it makes much less sense at lower levels. Simply put, one cannot reduce clauses into phrases or single-word modifiers without expanded clausal structures to tighten. Consolidation of syntax presupposes an ability to chunk information into more abstract units, not to mention an ability to consider the needs of readers.

As James Moffett (1968, 72) puts it, "Sentences must grow rank before they can be trimmed." He argues further—and this is a very important point—that the ability to reduce clauses, to tighten language, "refers not only to some sentence transformations but also to a psychological process of language maturation" (173). Moffett's conclusion provides a focus for informed discussion about sentence combining:

> The pedagogical issue . . . is not whether children's syntax should grow in the direction of more and longer clauses—it must—but, rather, when and by what means students can feel the need for clause reduction and thus learn to exploit it for rhetorical advantage. (173)

Much of the misunderstanding about SC centers on this point. We need to remember that syntax

mirrors the mind at work, wrestling with thought; and we need to *expect* that students, particularly those with weak backgrounds in reading or little practice in writing, will write many disastrous sentences before writing good ones.

In short, we probably need to take a long view of language development. Good teachers at any level get students to pay attention to language. Then language does the teaching.

4. Sentence Combining and Rhetoric

As part of a discussion that sets forth a discourse-processing theory in relation to SC practice, Robert de Beaugrande (1985, 68) both demonstrates and summarizes a vitally important point:

> In general, short, simple sentences are suitable when readers may find the content difficult or unfamiliar, or if the writer wants to convey the impression of important content. . . . Longer, more complex sentences are suitable for easy or familiar content that demands no special focus.

If SC is to be considered useful only in areas of arrangement and style, this statement has important implications.

It suggests that the information of the text has been a missing element in the ongoing debate between proponents of syntactic fluency and syntactic economy. (Fluency advocates have derived their canons of quality from statistical analyses of contemporary prose, particularly in "better" magazines; economy advocates have derived theirs from readability research and influential textbooks on style, focusing mainly on "functional" writing.) It also suggests that the needs and perceptions of readers must always be estimated in relation to text content.

In other words, "effectiveness" in transactional writing comes neither from lengthening nor shortening sentences in accord with presumed rules, however derived. Clarity results from adjusting prose to rhetorical demands—more specifically, to the density of the information to be communicated to a target audience. And by the same token, so does obfuscation.

The notion here is that syntax cannot really be separated from other levels of discourse processing. De Beaugrande (1985, 67) discusses the role of syntax in this way:

> Simple sentences are easier to read, but soon lose any advantage in speed or accuracy when readers are asked to answer content questions. . . . [The] length, complexity, and type of sentences mainly affect the shallow, earlier stages of reading; more profound, lasting effects result from the density and integratedness of content.

If de Beaugrande's speculation is correct, the case for SC in a rhetorical context becomes all the more compelling. Helping students learn when, how, and why to integrate content becomes the center of SC instruction.

To this might be added the thoughts of rhetorician James Kinneavy (1979, 66), reflecting on the success of SC research at the college level: "It may be that the most important part of sentence combining lessons was not the sentence combining but the functional teaching of rhetorical principles connected to the exercises."

5. Sentence Combining as Cognitive Nudging

The metaphor of "chunking" relates to the above point—integrating information through writing. According to Mellon (1979, 18), the term (from George Miller's work on cognitive processing) "is not a theory but merely a loose way of talking about hierarchical class-inclusion relationships."

Nevertheless, chunking has been an attractive idea to SC proponents from Kellogg Hunt onward. The reason, of course, is that combining (a syntactic activity) and chunking (a mental activity) are both combinatorial processes. In both, information is transformed or packaged so that it "nests" within certain structures, which in turn "nest" within higher-order structures. To visualize this, you might think of Chinese boxes, infinitely large and infinitely small. While combining and chunking are always manifested in finite terms, their potential remains open-ended, infinite.

According to cognitive theory, chunking is the mechanism that enables us to develop concepts and negotiate increasing levels of abstraction. In fact, the limits of human memory—seven chunks of information (more or less) at any level—are what cause us to repackage information into more abstract categories. Quite simply, it is the hierarchical networking of the brain that makes retrieval of verbally encoded meanings possible.

SC has been viewed by O'Hare (1973), Combs (1975), and others not merely as an analogous activity to chunking but as a parallel one. In other words, SC has been seen as a possible way *into* cognitive development. The reasoning goes like this: If

syntactic fluency contributes to writing quality—and if writing quality is a measure of cognitive growth—then fluency influences mental development. Brave new worlds, indeed.

The point of comparison between combining and chunking is that embedded sentences seem to be syntactic chunks in much the same way that words and experiences are conceptual chunks. Moreover, sentences can be seen as chunks within larger structures—paragraphs for some people, discourse blocs for others. Finally, de Beaugrande (1985, 67) cites evidence that "sentence boundaries often function as conceptual boundaries as well." Indeed, a sentence may naturally chunk the particulars of an event. He notes that studies of reading comprehension show "human memory itself does some sentence combining on occasion."

Mellon's (1979, 19) view is that SC neither causes the growth of overt conceptual knowledge nor causes students to acquire new linguistic operations. He limits the claim for SC to "practicing certain surface-structure combining strategies that can be actively taught and learned." But Mellon does believe that between grades seven and nine SC "can trigger the onset of decentering . . . shortly after . . . the child reaches the stage of abstract logical thought."

Again, the issue is a complex one, and again, the experts are divided. One can only hope that the future holds some answers to the question of cognitive nudging through SC.

6. A Psycholinguistically Valid Curriculum

Psycholinguists now know a great deal about language acquisition. Hence, the issue for some program developers is one of linguistic engineering—that is, how to design materials and experiences that move students up the developmental ladder. Such a curriculum would be based not upon a traditional taxonomy of grammar but rather upon the psychological facts of language development.

In the view of Kellogg Hunt (1977, 102), such foundations are now taking shape. Hunt writes that "surely it is possible to test whether a transformation can be taught at a certain age by a certain amount of repetition, or cannot be taught at all until later."

While Hunt believes in naturalistic approaches, he is making the case for a complementary, empirically tested program to enhance syntactic fluency—one that capitalizes on the emerging intuitions of children. Mellon (1981, 55) hints at the same idea, though not in the context of SC. Programs need to ensure, he says, "that students experience the right *forms* of language use, organized in the right *sequences*, and followed up by the right kinds of purposeful and corrective *feedback*." Almost needless to say, such assumptions would not be shared by those who stress the pragmatic basis of language acquisition.

The work of Joseph Lawlor moves in directions suggested by Hunt and is very useful for teachers interested in developing their own SC materials. Lawlor (1983) outlines a developmental taxonomy for five structures—coordinates, adverbials, restrictive noun modifiers, noun substitutes, and free modifiers. Each of these categories is based upon research in written syntax, and each is presented in levels of increasing difficulty. It would seem reasonable to use SC exercises to validate Lawlor's sequence, making changes as necessary in the taxonomy. A sequence for second-language learners, for example, would almost surely have some major differences.

I would also recommend two other articles for teachers interested in the design of SC materials—one practical, one theoretical. The first is Charles Cooper's "An Outline for Writing Sentence-Combining Problems" (1973). The second is the essay cited above, Robert de Beaugrande's "Sentence Combining and Discourse Processing: In Search of a General Theory" (1985), which makes three points as part of a larger discussion:

> The basic sentences to be combined should be spontaneous, naturally occurring samples that students might actually write, preferably ones that students *did* write.
>
> Sentence combining should be deployed discerningly to cases where there is a demonstrable benefit. In practice, this guideline means that sentence combining is best used as an editing technique for the resolution of commonplace writing problems.
>
> Training should steer away from—and teach students to steer away from—excessive, muddled complexity.

Two additional articles—"Teaching the Grammar of Discourse" by Janice Hays (1980) and "Sentence Combining in a Rhetorical Framework: Directions

for Further Research" by Stephen Harris and Stephen Witte (1980)—will be of special interest to college teachers.

7. The Future of Sentence Combining

Is SC an instructional dead end? Or is it a brave new world just waiting to be explored? The answer will depend on whether imaginative teachers can develop (and exploit) new types of exercises and relate them to the goals of writing instruction.

One of the rarely mentioned facts about SC is that exercises can be used to teach *content* as well as writing skills. In a science review lesson, for example, an elementary teacher might help students to list what they know in the form of sentences. Students could then transform this information, practicing writing and science simultaneously. In literature, a teacher might work up notes on *Julius Caesar* into SC exercises; as students work together, they rehearse material for the unit exam and learn subskills of writing—for example, how to structure a character analysis. My own interest recently has been to create SC exercises that teach word etymologies.

Beyond content, however, SC also has the potential to model higher-level thinking skills. Willis Pitkin (1983), for example, has reported on exercises for fourth graders that teach how to make concessions as a part of a larger persuasive strategy. Charles Suhor (1978) has written about exercises that relate syntax to logic, with a focus on the latter. Russell A. Hunt (1985) has developed a "recombining" approach in his literature courses to help students with literary appreciation. James Stratman (1985) has explored how SC can be used to teach specific types of argumentative reasoning according to principles outlined by Stephen Toulmin (1958). And Lester Faigley (1985) has worked on "interventions" that create situational contexts, with students selecting and organizing relevant information for an audience and purpose.

My hunch is that future whole-discourse exercises will move toward specification of rhetorical contexts as part of the format. This will make the combining (or relating) activity a semantic/pragmatic problem as well as a syntactic one. Such grassroots developments will no doubt push SC theory and research. This push is essential if SC is to make headway against undeniably mindless approaches. With clearer delineation of the precise types of exercises used in research, we will develop a better sense of what works and what doesn't.

David Bartholomae (1985) makes the case for SC that requires students to transcend exercises. Instead of *selecting* information relevant to a controlling idea—as in the exercises developed by Faigley—Bartholomae tries to combine *all* information, including contradictory information, into coherent discourse. He even demonstrates how exercises on two different topics might be shuffled together, prompting students to work metaphorically. As Bartholomae puts it, "an exercise that appears to be a closed game (find the paragraph the exercise-maker had in mind) can become a game of another kind altogether" (309). This is possible, he writes, because the grammar of discourse is not as fixed as the grammar of the sentence.

Another possibility, briefly discussed earlier in this chapter in the section called "SC Research in Perspective," lies in interactive SC—print and computer programs that create narrative frames for middle school students. (See activity 1.) Each exercise represents the beginning to a chapter of a novella (or a novel) that students are to write. Prompts are provided to help students create elaborations between the SC transformations; then students are directed to extend the unfinished chapter, aiming for a given end sentence that provides a "hook" into the next chapter. The aim of such programs is to teach basic skills and text elaboration simultaneously. The question is whether an interactive serial format can help make SC a means to a larger end—independence in writing. (Strong 1985b).

One key to the future of SC is to use student language in exercise design and to use exercises more diagnostically—as "windows" into language processing. A second key is to create problem-solving contexts for exercises so that the resulting language is not a "textoid," to use Russell Hunt's term. And the third key is to find ways of making exercises more interactive than they presently are.

A Summary of Ten Basic Assumptions

So far I have covered the background of SC, summarized some research highlights, shown the difference between cued and open exercises, and presented conflicting points of view about the role—if any—that SC should play in writing instruction. Implicitly, I have been arguing for a broader

definition of the approach—one encompassing a range of mental activities.

In the discussion of seven key issues—(1) rationale, (2) interaction versus imitation, (3) growth in language, (4) rhetorical context, (5) cognitive development, (6) curriculum sequencing, and (7) future prospects—I have tried to present matters fairly yet offer my own views on occasion.

To conclude this section on Theory and Research, I present a list of ten assumptions that seem to underlie the SC approach. These points recapitulate or reemphasize those made earlier. They also anticipate ideas that will be developed more fully in the Practice section that follows.

1. SC is not real writing. However cleverly devised they may be, exercises are no substitute for naturalistic (real writing) experiences in which students create personal meanings. SC is a skill-building adjunct to a language/composition program, not a busywork curriculum.
2. SC is not a model of the composing process. Most SC pertains to revision and editing, not invention or drafting. Moreover, real writing evolves from invented or discovered meanings, not given ones. SC *can* serve as a writing springboard when students enter an exercise imaginatively.
3. SC exercises come in two basic varieties: cued (or signaled) and open (usually whole-discourse) exercises. Cued problems are useful for teaching target transformations, while open exercises help teach stylistic decision making in a larger prose context.
4. SC is one approach to improved syntactic fluency—namely, better control and maturity in sentence construction. However, the aim of SC is to make good sentences, not merely long ones. Students should be taught that clarity counts—and that brevity has force.
5. SC instruction assumes that mistakes are a natural, inevitable, and desirable part of language learning. Mistakes provide feedback. The point is to learn from errors, not practice them. Usage workshops are a regular part of SC, with students sharing and comparing solutions to problem sentences.
6. SC instruction should move from oral rehearsal to written transcription. In transferring power from their primary language system (speaking) to the secondary system (writing), students develop inner speech, a physiological prerequisite for composing. SC helps develop automaticity and syntactic control.
7. SC can be used to teach virtually any language/composition concept inductively. Active/passive voice, sentence variety, transitions, parallel structure, free modifiers, paragraph organization, cohesion—all can be approached through SC exercises. Even literary appreciation can be taught with SC.
8. SC requires that teachers model editing and decision-making skills with students. Students should be encouraged to give reasons for their stylistic decisions. Mindless combining—without instructional focus or follow-up work—will soon prove boring to a class. Too much SC ruins its appeal.
9. SC is mainly a synthetic process, not an analytic one. Sooner or later, however, analysis plays a role—as in the decombining of overly complex texts. Teachers should share their viewpoints, not impose them as gospel. Rhetorical contexts for SC help achieve analytic aims.
10. SC works best when done two or three times a week for short periods, when students use exercises as springboards for journals or controlled writing, when teachers and students monitor problem sentences, and when transfer is made to real writing—either through decombined student drafts or marginal notations.

PRACTICE

A young teacher moves towards me, smiling pleasantly. "You're the workshop presenter?" she asks.

"Right," I grin.

"I use sentence combining already."

"Hey, terrific."

"It doesn't work in *my* class."

"Not so loud," I joke, putting my finger to my lips. "Others will hear you."

"I'm serious. My students just don't like it."

I pause. This person *is* serious, so the workshop materials will have to wait.

"Okay, tell me how you use the approach."

"What do you mean?" she asks.

"How do you structure the in-class practice with sentence combining? What do you have kids do?"

She looks at me questioningly. "Well, I assign an exercise—usually toward the end of class. You know, to keep the class busy? Or maybe on an assembly day if they're getting hyper."

"The same exercise for all students?"

"Yes. But each student works alone."

"What happens with the sentences they've transformed?"

Silence begins to grow between us as she wonders about the point of my questions.

"Do you have students compare the results of what they've combined? Do you discuss sentence options and make choices as a group?"

"Uhm, no. Not so far."

"After the students have finished an exercise," I ask, "what do you usually have them do?"

She smiles again. "Oh, I see what you're getting at. We exchange papers—or kids come up to my desk—and I tell them whether their answers are right or wrong."

A Context for Sentence Combining (SC)

The point of the preceding true story is not to belittle a teacher who was doing the best she knew how with open exercises. My own failures have been equally, if not more, dramatic. Trial-and-error teaching is never easy—for instructors *or* for students.

The point is that although SC has a track record in research, its effects can easily be subverted. I want to stress, too, that whatever else it may be, SC is not an approach for people who need an answer key. Indeed, its real aim is to make students the answer key. In other words, SC is an adjunct to writing instruction, not an escape from it.

My purpose in what follows is to outline many ways to use SC in writing classes. The first subsection deals with cued SC—more specifically, the types of cues popularized by Frank O'Hare. I then show how open exercises might be introduced and used in a typical middle school classroom. Next I deal with practical matters such as orchestrating in-class practice, handling "mistakes," and creating various types of SC.

Beginning with subsection 8, the focus shifts to skills—a variation of pattern practice that may help special students. Topics such as grammar, usage/mechanics, and sentence economy follow. In subsection 14, I then move into arenas more explicitly rhetorical—stylistics, recombining and generative exercises, the problem of context, and analytic activities of different kinds. If you already use SC regularly, you will probably find new ideas in these latter sections. My aim throughout is to suggest the range and flexibility of SC by including a variety of exercises.

To understand how SC works in typical classes, pay special attention to the early subsections. With basic principles of oral rehearsal in mind, you can then read more selectively, finding material that addresses your particular questions or teaching situation. To assist your reading, I have coded the sections as follows:

G: General
E: Elementary
MS: Middle School

HS: High School
C: College
SE: Special Education

I also want to recommend two superbly useful teaching articles available through ERIC—one by Donald A. Daiker, Andrew Kerek, and Max Morenberg (1979), the other by Jack Perron (1976). For high school and college instructors, the team of Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg discusses (in depth) the in-class approach with the open, whole-discourse exercises that led to gains in writing quality at Miami University. For elementary and middle school teachers, Perron gives direction on a rich variety of SC activities in a "naturalistic" language framework, the kind suggested by James Moffett.

This Practice section closes with some final notes on transfer of learning and a summary list of teaching suggestions. Teachers interested in additional classroom ideas should see *Making Sense Out of Sentence Combining* by Ronald V. Evans (1984).

Answers to Twenty Questions

1. Introducing Cued (Signaled) SC (G)

Let's begin by considering "warm-ups." These are short (single-sentence) exercises drawn from classroom writing, from literature being studied, or from SC textbooks. With only the briefest introduction, you might have students consider a set of exercises that uses their names. Exercises of increasing difficulty, with or without cues, can be adapted to almost any class. Some examples:

1. Soon-Kim speaks Korean.
   Soon-Kim speaks English. (AND)
2. Jenny is wearing earrings.
   The earrings are gold.
   They are very attractive. (THAT)
3. Buzz gets ten points.
   He combines these sentences. (IF)
   His combining will be correct. (-LY)
4. Tom cracks his knuckles. (WHEN)
   A teacher gets irritated.
   The teacher is mellow.
5. Joan has a suntan. (SINCE)
   Her suntan is terrific.
   We know SOMETHING.
   She didn't work all summer. (THAT)
6. A teacher deserves a class like this.
   The teacher is intelligent. (WHO)
   The class is clever.
   It can handle combining. (THAT)
   The combining is increasingly complex.

As you have perhaps already figured out, the SC game has a system of clues. Here are some basics as outlined by O'Hare (1975):

> Underlined words are modifiers that are inserted into a base sentence either before or after the words modified.
>
> Clues in parentheses at the end of a line move to the front to take the place of repeated words (adjective clauses), or they simply move to the front before their line joins the base sentence (adverb clauses).
>
> *SOMETHING* is a placeholder to be replaced by a full sentence (noun clause). The line to join it may have a *THAT* clue (to be moved to the front before joining) or nothing, in which case, the clue will read *JUST JOIN*. Simply put, most clues move to the front of the line they occur on, and everything in the clue is used.

After some warm-up language play, you might ask the class, "How are we able to do what we've just been doing?" The point is to get students thinking about their built-in linguistic ability. Listen to the students' explanations.

You might point out, in the context of SC warm-up sentences, that certain ways of combining have been recurring: (1) using connectors, (2) deleting unnecessary words, (3) rearranging words, and (4) changing word endings. The point of SC practice, you might explain, is to get better at moving sentence parts around.

Ask students how such practice might help in real writing situations. Reinforce the idea that fluency in sentence making frees the mind to focus on planning and organization.

A good source of exercise material for cued exercises is the class itself. Have students interview each other in teams of two and then write a series of single *positive* sentences about their partner. To make the sentence writing a challenge, try specifying lengths for sentences—say, six, nine, twelve, fifteen, and eighteen words—so that students learn how to expand or contract syntax by working toward a "target." Depending on students' abilities,

you can adjust the target sentence lengths so that students are challenged but not frustrated.

In another version of this activity, each student gets five 3-x-5 cards, writes his or her name at the top of each card, and then puts the cards in a box that is passed around. On the second pass of the box, each student draws out five cards and writes a single positive sentence on each, following the earlier directions.

For obvious reasons, no one should be allowed to put cards back, even if one's own name is drawn. Using the flip side of the cards, you (or your students) can then decombine the originals into a series of kernel sentences; you then present these exercises in later SC sessions. (See subsection 5 for instructions on how to create your own SC exercises.)

Another source of exercise sentences is your literature anthology. These sentences can either be set up with cues or left open. The cues will nudge students toward more complex constructions used by skilled writers; the open combining allows students to compare their sentences with those of a professional. With the second approach, there is inherent motivation in seeing whether one's syntactic "moves" are like those of a skilled writer. Also, by withholding the original sentences, you force students to read quite closely.

The cues for SC practice are a little tricky at first but soon become internalized. The main thing is not to let the cuing apparatus dominate the instruction. Cues, after all, are simply a means of eliciting target transformations. The following guidelines may help you construct personalized SC exercises or explain to students how the SC game is played:

1. SC exercises are normally set up so that the base clause comes first.
2. Modifying sentences that follow the base clause (or any clause) are processed from left to right, not randomly, through the clause.
3. Connecting words are put in parentheses following the sentence in which they appear.
4. Words or phrases that will be embedded (inserted) into another sentence are underlined.
5. The underline cue should probably be used instead of cross-out lines to keep the SC problem uncluttered, as in the above examples.
6. *SOMETHING* is used as a "placeholder" word for noun constructions, as in example 5 above.
7. Word ending cues—for example, *(-ING)*, *(-LY)*, or *('S)*—can be introduced after students get comfortable with more basic cues.
8. Punctuation cues can also be added to SC problems, either with connectors—for example, *(BECAUSE . . . ,)* or *(,AND)*—or alone *(;)*.
9. Transition cues—for example, *(MOREOVER,)* and *(IN SUMMARY,)*—should be engineered into whole-discourse SC problems to teach logical moves in prose.
10. In general, SC problems should use as few cues as possible, and students should be encouraged to combine "in *their* way" after successfully using the cues.

Studying cued SC exercises is the best way to learn their conventions. Here is an easy dialogue drill that you can use to help students internalize cues. Exercises like this are fairly easy to construct, especially if you team up with others in your school or department to share materials.

X. I like sentence combining.
It is very easy. (BECAUSE)

Y. I can see SOMETHING.
You're skilled in combining. (THAT)
Please tell me SOMETHING.
You acquired your skill. (HOW)

X. I would say SOMETHING.
My intelligence was the key. (THAT)
My intelligence is natural.

Y. Please tell me more.
I am fascinated by this. (BECAUSE)
My fascination is complete. (-LY)

X. I first began with sentences.
The sentences were short.
The sentences were simple.

Y. You must have been a genius.
The genius was a child.
The genius was budding.

X. Then I began connecting.
Then I began embedding. (,)
Then I began rearranging. (,AND)

Y. And you did this as a child?
You did this without instruction?
The instruction would be direct.

X. I mentioned earlier. (AS)
I am intelligent.
My intelligence is natural. (-LY)

Y. I can see SOMETHING.
Your brains match your skill. (THAT)
Your brains match your humility. (AND)

Another cuing approach, particularly useful with more complex constructions, is indentation. The base clause is set to the left, and different "levels" of modifiers are indented slightly to the right. This approach helps students to see more clearly how sentence parts relate to the whole sentence.

Indentation can be used either with the cues described earlier or with an open (slightly cued) format. Francis Christensen originally used this form of visual diagramming to explain cumulative sentences; however, it is equally useful with SC practice. Activity 2 shows some examples (focused on cumulative-style sentences) for use in the upper grades.

2. Introducing Open, Whole-Discourse SC (G)

Let's move now to open, whole-discourse exercises of the simplest kind. Activity 3 is a typical beginning-level SC exercise (taken from Strong 1983), each cluster of which represents a potential new sentence.

In introducing such an exercise, explain that there are many right answers for this kind of SC. Also emphasize that while the aim of combining is to make good sentences, "it's okay to make mistakes because we *learn* from errors." The point is to encourage students to take risks and not to be afraid of trying different-sounding sentences.

Many students are worried about "sounding dumb" in front of their peers. Stress that making bloopers is no big deal. (You might talk about the bloopers programs on TV to make the point that errors can even be fun.)

Ask the class for different ways to put the first cluster of short sentences into a new sentence—a "transformation" or "write-out." Tell students that they can (1) *add* connecting words, (2) *take out* unnecessary words, (3) *move* words around, and (4) *change* word endings. (This list of strategies can go on the board.) At this point, you want to show—not talk about—the extraordinary flexibility of English syntax.

A playful—and therefore useful—gimmick at this early stage is a series of three hand gestures to signal class judgments about various sentences that come up. "Thumbs up" means that the sentence is grammatical and clear; a "wavering" hand motion means that the sentence is grammatical perhaps, but only marginally so; and "thumbs down" means that the sentence is ungrammatical or logically off target. To show students how these judgments work, you can model two transformations in each category.

As students deal with the "Value Judgment" exercise in activity 3, they quickly come up with grammatical possibilities such as these:

1a. Carol was working hard on her test, and Sue slipped her a note.

1b. As Carol worked hard on her test, Sue slipped her a note.

1c. Carol was working hard on her test when Sue slipped her a note.

Other transformations, partly because of their passive voice, will seem a bit awkward or confusing.

1d. Working hard on her test, Carol was slipped a note by Sue.

1e. It was Carol, hard at work on her test, who was slipped a note by Sue.

1f. A note was slipped from Sue to Carol, who was working hard on her test.

And, finally, some possibilities (the asterisk indicates an unacceptable sentence) will simply not work.

1g. *Carol working hard on her test, Sue slip her a note.

1h. *On her test Carol was hardly working, and a note Sue slipped to her.

1i. *Slipping a note to Carol was Sue, who was working hard on her test.

Relying on their intuitions about how sentences are supposed to sound—and checking this knowledge against their sense of given meanings in the SC problem—most students immediately recognize that certain constructions are clearer and easier to comprehend than others. And that, of course, is the point. It is students' *intuitions* (or built-in linguistic competence) that SC should draw out as naturally as possible.

To accomplish this aim, emphasize that no one makes fun of anyone else's mistakes. "Would you laugh at someone who was practicing guitar or practicing foul shots?" you might ask. "Of course not. A person is bound to make lots of mistakes when learning something new—and making more complex sentences is no exception. To learn, you

have to make mistakes. So let's respect each other's efforts."

Work through two or three clusters before pairing up students for combining practice. This oral rehearsal provides a chance to test out various sentences in a safe, friendly environment of sharing and comparing, with each student serving as audience (and source of feedback) for the other. Teams search for new transformations during a five-minute period by alternating their solutions to various clusters. This back-and-forth practice stretches linguistic muscles and gets students involved. A second five-minute period can be used to transcribe two or three transformations for each cluster.

Then reconvene the class for "round robin" combining—usually three repetitions of the exercise. The rules are elegantly simple: Once a transformation is uttered, it's "spoken for." In other words, each student (or team) that offers a transformation "owns" it. No one else can use that same sentence again. This forces students to come up with other options, ones presumably drawn from their earlier rehearsal.

At this point, you may invite students to experiment with the exercise—first by leaving some sentences uncombined, then by combining ones that have already been transformed. The stylistic results are quite different, of course:

1. Carol was hard at work on her test when Sue slipped a note to her. Not wanting her teacher to see, she unfolded it carefully.
2. Carol was working hard on her test when Sue slipped her a note, which she carefully unfolded because she didn't want her teacher to see.

You might emphasize that long sentences are not necessarily good ones—that often shorter is better. On the other hand, sometimes longer sentences are *clearer* because of their connectors and modifiers. Explain that audience and writing purpose affect one's decisions about sentence length and complexity.

You may also want to challenge the student teams. While students focus on a specific cluster—say, the second one in the exercise—you can give oral prompts like these:

1. Begin with *carefully.*
2. Begin with *not wanting.*
3. Begin with *the paper.*
4. Begin with *to keep.*
5. Use *because* as a connector.
6. Use a semicolon and *therefore.*
7. Use *so that* as a connector.
8. Use *in order to* as a connector.

Students can try out sentences on each other, working together to solve each challenge, or they can write out their solutions. (To teach grammar-to-writing linkage in the upper grades, the tasks might be to open with a participial phrase or to try an introductory dependent clause.) Such prompts help teach sentence variety.

Or you might send teams to the chalkboard or ask them to write on acetate sheets that you hand out. In this activity, students transcribe two or three write-outs for each cluster, and the class votes (by raising hands) on the "best" sentences. Alternatives are read aloud to help students develop a feel for differences in style and meaning. Here are three options for the third cluster in "Value Judgment":

3a. The note asked for help on an important question.

3b. The note asked for help on a question that was important.

3c. What the note asked for was help on a question of importance.

By comparing options such as the ones above, students quickly realize that some sentences sound better than others—and that *judgments about quality often depend on the context of preceding sentences.* The context, in this case, is an emerging one, with each vote taking into account the previous choices.

The process of saying or whispering sentences aloud—of making repeated judgments about how sentences sound in a larger context—is clearly one of the basics of writing instruction. (Even now, as I compose this sentence, for example, my mind is sorting through options. When I hesitate, my eyes flick back, reading and rereading, searching for cues that will move me ahead. I write a sentence and draw a line through it. Then I reread and start again with a different emphasis, listening to a voice within.) To some extent, SC practice simulates—and probably stimulates—this complex process.

To make judgments (a psychological activity), one must first hold alternative constructions in short-term memory (a physiological activity). It is the repeated activity of seeing and hearing sentences against a backdrop of meaning that brings intuitions to the surface. And skill in revising depends on such intuitions.

ACTIVITY 2

Identation Cues

The thicket was dark.
The thicket was warm.
I found the gravediggers. (IN WHICH)
The gravediggers were at work.
The sky was overcast.

The thicket in which I found the gravediggers at work was dark and warm, the sky overcast.

E. B. White
"Death of a Pig"

He had crossed the room. (WHEN)
He drew up a chair.
He sat at a corner of the table.
He was between Sylvester and the rich man.
This was without a nod of greeting.
This was without a change in his set face.
His face was gray.

When he had crossed the room he drew up a chair and sat at a corner of the table, between Sylvester and the rich man, without a nod of greeting or a change in his set, gray face.

Carson McCullers
"The Jockey"

We saw dozens of chuckwallas.
They were scurrying from hiding places.
The hiding places were perfectly good.
They were rushing across our path.
They were trying to hide between rocks.
They were trying to hide under rocks.
They were digging in frantically.

We saw dozens of chuckwallas scurrying from perfectly good hiding places, rushing across our path and trying to hide between or under rocks, digging in frantically.

Edward Abbey
Abbey's Road

Something will happen in its death throes.
The Sun will slowly pulsate.
It will expand once every few millennia. (-ING)
It will contract once every few millennia. (-ING)
It will eventually spew its atmosphere. (-ING)
The spewing will be into space.
The spewing will be in one or more concentric shells of gas.

In its death throes, the Sun will slowly pulsate, expanding and contracting once every few millennia, eventually spewing its atmosphere into space in one or more concentric shells of gas.

Carl Sagan
Cosmos

ACTIVITY 3

Value Judgment

1.1 Carol was working hard on her test.
1.2 Sue slipped her a note.

2.1 Carol unfolded the paper carefully.
2.2 She didn't want her teacher to see.

3.1 The note asked for help on a question.
3.2 The question was important.

4.1 Carol looked down at her paper.
4.2 She thought about the class's honor system.

5.1 Everyone had made a pledge.
5.2 The pledge was not to cheat.

6.1 Carol didn't want to go back on her word.
6.2 Sue was her best friend.

7.1 Time was running out.
7.2 She had to make up her mind.

8.1 Her mouth felt dry.
8.2 Her mouth felt tight.

Assignment: Finish the story. Explain the reasons behind Carol's judgment.

Reprinted with permission from William Strong, 1983, *Sentence Combining: A Composing Book*, 2d ed. (New York: Random House), p. 4.

Following comparison voting—first modeled with the entire class, then practiced in small groups—students begin to see that SC exercises demand patient, imaginative problem solving. The answers come from a group's linguistic resources, not from outside rules. But because different arrangements create shifts in emphasis, it is always the *individual* who is the decision maker, the shaper of language. Each individual transcribes his or her decisions.

When an exercise such as "Value Judgment" has been written out, several things can happen: (1) it can be handed in for credit, not for grading, (2) it can be shared in small groups as part of focused proofreading or judging practice, (3) it can be put on a ditto master so that the efforts of two or more students are "published" and compared, (4) it can be enriched with details generated by students in typical prewriting activities, or (5) it can be a springboard for an in-class (or journal) assignment.

In the case of "Value Judgment," the follow-up assignment asks students to sort out the issues of friendship and honesty in a continuing narrative. However, the same exercise could provide a narrative opening for an expository piece—one focused on the broader idea of value conflict in our lives.

As we will see later, separate SC exercises can also serve as "bookends" for original student writing.

3. Structuring In-Class SC Practice (G)

The basic in-class approach is to pair students with a partner—as in a ping-pong match. Students take turns combining as they work through an exercise orally; after it is completed, they figuratively switch courts. They do the exercise again, with each person focusing on alternate SC clusters. To make the game challenging, neither player can use the other's previous sentences.

A variation of this approach is for one student to dictate the first word for a write-out. If the team member cannot figure out how to put the cluster together, the partner provides the answer. (This activity makes each student the "teacher" on an alternating basis.) A related variation is for one student to dictate his or her *sentences* to a partner for transcription. After one student has completed an entire exercise through dictation, roles are reversed. The just-completed text provides a check that sentences are not merely repeated.

Dictation exercises of this kind have unexpected benefits: readers gain practice in clear oral reading and breaking syntax into chunks of meaning, and transcribers must hold sentences in short-term memory and attend to many auditory cues.

A third version of the dictation game requires each team member to work independently and create a flawless text. With the exercise set aside, students then dictate their texts to their partners. Finally, each person compares his or her transcription against the original, noting differences in spelling, punctuation, and mechanics. (In this way, students become "answer keys" for each other.)

Another enjoyable way for students to compare written texts is through cluster-by-cluster paper swapping. Partners work on separate sheets of paper, each person focusing on the same cluster. Then they swap papers. They then move on to the next cluster and repeat the process, working their way collectively through an exercise. Next, the partners put their papers side by side to figure out, sentence by sentence, which write-outs they prefer. This "round robin" writing can also be done in groups of three or four to expand the options for each cluster.

Three final ideas deserve brief mention. The first extends the sentence-selection activity described earlier with the "Value Judgment" exercise. After getting students to collaborate on making the best possible paragraph from an exercise, Gail Schade in Waterville, Maine, asks other *teachers* to judge which single version, from four or five different classes, is superior. The criteria? Clarity, correctness, and style. "The competition," Schade writes, "seems to give students incentive."

The second idea involves putting kernel sentences in an *unclustered* format so that teams of students must decide "what goes with what." Partners collaborate on doing transformations; these are compared with write-outs from another team. (These comparisons are made public by putting them on transparencies, the chalkboard, or a ditto master.)

The third activity begins with your cutting an exercise into separate clusters—with no identifying numbers—and asking students to first combine sentences, then arrange them into a coherent order. To accomplish this task, students must collaborate extensively. (In choosing material for this task, it is important to use exercises that have a chronological sequence or some other transparent method of development.)

Building on similar activities, Judy Markline at Allan Hancock College, Santa Maria, California,

has developed assignments for basic writers that follow a prewriting cycle. Markline first uses SC as a model of a particular task—say, describing a place. After introducing the assignment, students work in groups of three or four, combining sentences of the model, writing their sentences on the board or on transparencies, and selecting the best ones for a class paragraph.

When the next period begins, students have copied sentences into their journals in paragraph form. Markline encourages them to combine further, to decombine, to add a title—"to do whatever they feel improves the paragraph." In this session, she has the original paragraph on a transparency. Students volunteer additions and changes from their journals. After this is done, Markline points to the opening sentence, the specific details, or whatever seems important. Students then study another model, comparing it to the one that they have combined. "At this point," Markline says, "they are ready to prewrite."

Markline's approach is modeling with a difference. Instead of handing out a professional paragraph and admonishing her students to "go forth and do likewise," she develops an *interactive* model, one that involves her students. Not surprisingly, students have a clear idea of *what* is expected and *how* it might be accomplished.

SC "works" under such circumstances.

4. Handling "Wrong Answers" with SC (G)

The easy answer to the question of handling wrong answers is that there is no need to protect students, particularly if the right kind of risk-taking atmosphere exists. But such an answer is only partially satisfactory.

For one thing, many students equate being wrong with being "dumb." For another, some students are genuinely perplexed by SC, perhaps because of weak language backgrounds, perhaps because of uncertainty about expectations.

So teacher sensitivity is required. In situations where a student is clearly off-target, first acknowledge the effort with remarks like "good try," "thanks for your sentence," or "let's talk about that one." If you have created a climate of trust, you might repeat the sentence and ask for a judgment: "thumbs up," "thumbs down," or "in between." You might contrast the problem sentence with a similar construction in standard English. And, finally, you might put the problem sentence on the chalkboard or on a transparency to help everyone discuss it. No one can study a spoken sentence.

To help less-able students—whether mainstreamed youngsters, second-language learners, or basic writers—you need to find levels where they can function successfully yet still be challenged. The vocabulary of SC exercises may need to be modified or dealt with in advance (as with directed reading lessons). Also, the clusters in more complex SC exercises can be pared back to a more manageable size of two or three sentences.

Most importantly, students need to be shown, step by step, how to begin with a base clause and systematically add modifiers by embedding, rearranging, deleting, or using connecting words. For example, you might begin with two sentences for combining:

> The rancher's daughter spied a rustler.
>
> The rustler was a bullshooter.

After each student has combined in several ways and decided on a base clause, reveal additional kernels, one by one. In this instance, while *bullshooter* speaks for itself, you might need to discuss *doddering* and *bullrushes*.

> The rancher was doddering.
>
> The rustler was in the bullrushes.
>
> The bullrushes were rustling.

Some students will notice that "doddering rancher's daughter" is ambiguous. Sooner or later, someone will discover that "daughter of the doddering rancher" solves the problem. Depending on the class, you might press further:

> The rustler was smoking.
>
> The rustler was listening to bluegrass.

Help students to see that the ambiguity of "smoking and listening to bluegrass" can be solved by reversing the items.

The emphasis in such demonstrations should be on matching sound with sense. The aim is to develop *attention*—an awareness of the connection between spoken and written language.

Another suggestion is to try cloze-style exercises with less-able students. These exercises, like the signals and oral prompts discussed earlier, provide hints or context clues for students to work with. Activity 4 shows another illustrative exercise with context clues, not to mention wordplay. Depending on the skills of students, one can adjust the "hints."

ACTIVITY 4

Closure Cues

Gwen was a Zen comedienne.
She had no friends.
She developed a yen for Ben.
Ben was an Italian "specimen."

1. Gwen _____
   who _____
   until _____ .
   an _____ .
2. Gwen, _____ .
   developed _____ .
   who _____ .
3. Friendless _____ , a _____ .
   developed _____
   whose name was _____ .
4. When Gwen was _____
   without _____ , she _____
   for _____ Ben.
5. Gwen's _____ , an _____ .
   occurred when this Zen comedienne _____
   _____ .

The point is that closure cues can be used with *any* SC exercise, not just this one.

I want to stress that *students should write out complete sentences on their own paper, not merely "fill in the blanks."* Closure clues are *mental* starters. Remember: No one learns to make complete sentences by merely filling in blanks.

Particularly with less-able students, journals provide a nonthreatening way to encourage risk taking. And in this regard, cued (or open) exercises can be mini-assignments to structure the time when you are clearing the chaos from your desk and taking attendance. With two exercises on the board each day, students have a chance to accumulate "bonus points" in the first two minutes of class.

Consider using famous quotations as the source of these exercises; each quotation, when written out, becomes an optional prompt for journal writing. Activity 5 has a few examples. (The original quotation is first; the exercise developed from it follows.)

Besides using SC as journal starters, try alternating whole-discourse exercises on occasion with open-ended journal writing. Like real writing in journals, SC goes ungraded but not unchecked.

As much as anything, journals develop *conceptual fluency*, a willingness to "let ideas flow," as students phrase it. But the other side of the fluency coin is increased sentence variety and depth of modification—in other words, *syntactic fluency*. These two types are complementary, of course. This is why attention to both in writing journals can make good sense.

If SC practice does become part of journal-writing practice, the syntactic-fluency goal of SC should be discussed with the class. Remember: *Students are far more likely to profit from SC if they understand its purposes.* With good reason, they often want to know why a given activity is worth doing.

To withhold a rationale for SC is probably to reduce its effectiveness. Students will see it merely as a time filler.

5. Creating Original SC Exercises (G)

In creating your own exercises, first consider what you want to accomplish. Are you planning to model some type of writing? Do you want the exercise to deal with course content, current events, or students themselves? What teaching objective—or skill focus—do you have in mind? What directions, cues, or context will you build in? What sort of extension (or application) do you hope to achieve?

Potential material is often at your fingertips—a book of quotations, a content textbook, or an instructional unit. Elementary teachers in a St. Louis suburban district developed SC materials tied to social studies; teachers in Anchorage, Alaska, spent a weekend developing across-the-curriculum exercises. Holidays, community events, "inside" jokes, local traditions, and school problems are all possible sources for SC.

Getting started with SC development is much like any other writing task. Begin by creating a list of possible SC topics. After doing a cluster, list, or some background reading, narrow down to a topic that also interests *you*. Create whatever kind of prewriting starter you prefer. And then write. Activity 6 is an exercise that Patricia Camdal uses with her elementary students in South Carolina. From the following text, called "Our Lunchroom," she created an exercise designed to prompt problem solving. It is clustered in sentence pairs to make it accessible to younger students.

> (1) Our lunchroom has a problem that needs to be solved. (2) Some kids crowd into line and shove other kids, while other kids shout, making lots of noise. (3) Some groups start food fights, and others make messes that they don't clean up. (4) Even though a few kids cause the problem, everyone gets blamed. (5) We have a good school, so we should have a nice lunchroom. (6) In order to solve this problem, we need to get together.

When this exercise was used with students, they at first used *and* connectors. The teacher helped children to see many alternatives to *and . . . and . . . and:*

1a. Our lunchroom has a problem, and (the problem, it) needs to be solved.

1b. Our lunchroom has a problem (that, which) needs to be solved.

1c. Our lunchroom has a problem that needs a solution.

1d. Our lunchroom problem needs to be solved.

1e. The problem in our lunchroom needs a solution.

1f. In our lunchroom a problem needs to be solved.

Exercises can also be derived from outside reading. A few days ago, for example, I read an article about the declining number of college students who elect education as a career. Since I teach a writing course for prospective teachers, this caught my attention. I put the item in a manila folder with other

ACTIVITY 5

Journal Prompts

Wit is educated insolence. (Aristotle)

Wit is insolence.
The insolence is educated.

I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody. (Bill Cosby)

I don't know the key to success.
There is a key to failure.
It is trying to please everybody.

Afraid his ideas may be foolish, the novelist puts them in the mouth of another fool and reserves the right to disavow them. (Diane Johnson)

The novelist is afraid his ideas may be foolish.
The novelist puts them in the mouth of another fool.
The novelist reserves the right to disavow them.

Early to rise and early to bed make a male healthy, wealthy, and dead. (James Thurber)

Early to bed makes a male healthy.
It makes him wealthy.
It makes him dead.

Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, friend, acquaintance, or stranger. (Franklin P. Jones)

Honest criticism is hard to take.
This is particularly from a relative.
This is particularly from a friend.
This is particularly from an acquaintance.
This is particularly from a stranger.

ACTIVITY 6

Our Lunchroom

1.1 Our lunchroom has a problem.
1.2 The problem needs to be solved.

2.1 Some kids crowd into line.
2.2 They shove other kids.

3.1 Others shout.
3.2 They make lots of noise.

4.1 Some groups start fights.
4.2 The fights are with food.

5.1 Others make messes.
5.2 They don't clean them up.

6.1 A few kids cause the problem.
6.2 Everybody gets blamed.

7.1 We have a good school.
7.2 We should have a nice lunchroom.

8.1 We need to get together.
8.2 We need to solve this problem.

Assignment: Write up your ideas for solving the problem in our school lunchroom.

SC starters and later developed the brief exercise in activity 7 with both open and cued clusters.

Notice that I decided not to reduce all sentences to kernels. In cluster 3, for example, I might have done this:

3.3 This was a decrease.

3.4 The decrease was very sharp.

3.5 The decrease was in a period.

3.6 The period was very short.

Notice, too, that cues are used to help students with potentially tricky constructions. The intended appositive in cluster 3, for example, does not come naturally to most of my students.

At first you will probably find it easier to write out the text of your SC exercise, then analyze (decombine) it into shorter sentences as a second step. Later, however, you may be able to hold a target sentence in mind and simultaneously "see" its structure in terms of constituent sentences.

When you set up an exercise, sequence the sentences carefully. First identify one or more base clauses—the sentence(s) that other kernels will modify. Then begin to parse the clausal, phrasal, and single-word modifiers. As noted above, you may well decide to leave some of these modifiers in larger-than-kernel form to make the overall exercise shorter, clearer, and more readable.

Certain "engineering" problems will immediately emerge. In cluster 1 of activity 7, for example, I chose not to do this:

1.1 Fifteen years reveal SOMETHING.

1.2 The years are of statistics.

1.3 The pool has shrunk. (THAT)

1.4 The pool is of teachers.

To me, reducing prepositional phrases to their kernel form, as shown above, makes SC even more bizarre (and more remote from real writing) than it already is. It is not always possible to decombine into natural-sounding kernels, but that should certainly be a goal. On the other hand, certain "unnatural" conventions—for example, using SOMETHING as a slot for nominalization—do serve a pedagogical purpose.

Order the modifying sentences so that a student will move *left-to-right* through the base clause(s) in embedding or connecting them. Finally, test the exercise—first on yourself, then on people who will give you honest, helpful feedback. Revise as necessary.

All of this may sound complex and time-consuming. It does take time at first, but not as much as you might think. The real key (as well as the real timesaver) is to get your students involved in developing brief exercises and to team up with your colleagues. As students analyze sentences—perhaps as part of grammar instruction—they begin to see how modifying words and phrases "nest" within other structures.

Pay particular attention to SC formats in later subsections. You may want to use them as models—or points of departure—for your own materials.

6. Creating SC from Student Texts (G)

"Homegrown" SC frequently works better than "store-bought" material. And teachers who derive occasional SC from student texts rarely have concerns about transfer of learning. Their teaching *assists* transfer.

First, set the stage by taking one of your own paragraphs and breaking it down into kernels or near kernels. Challenge the class to create your original version by "psyching out" your writing style. As they compare their versions with yours, discuss why you made certain syntactic choices. Acknowledge the good ideas of your class by making some revisions in your text.

This demonstration communicates the tone for in-class workshops. It helps students know what to expect. And this decreases their anxiety about participating in such a workshop.

Later, when you spot an especially nice passage of student text, ask the writer to create an SC exercise from it. This material, when put on a ditto or photocopied, can stir interest in a class. After doing SC, students compare their versions against the original. This comparison proves instructive both to the class and to a young writer secretly yearning to be published.

On the flip side of personalized SC is revision work. Take a problem passage from your own writing and decombine it. Ask the class for help on the passage. (Usually the decombining process itself reveals where the writing is going wrong.) As you get suggestions from the class on either content or style, make appropriate revisions.

Now, look for student passages that might be improved. For example, the text of a middle school youngster might be linked together with a series of *and*s. The content is fine, but the expression needs work. SC is an easy way to help developing writers see alternatives to *and . . . and . . . and.*

ACTIVITY 7

Crisis Ahead?

1.1 Fifteen years of statistics reveal SOMETHING.
1.2 The pool of new teachers has shrunk. (THAT)
1.3 The shrinking is steady. (-LY)
1.4 The shrinking is dramatic. (-LY)

2.1 Something happened in 1971.
2.2 Twenty percent of graduates went into teaching.
2.3 The graduates were from college.
2.4 The graduates were in the U.S.

3.1 Something happened by 1981.
3.2 The number had dropped to 12 percent.
3.3 This was a very sharp decrease.
3.4 The decrease was in a short period.

4.1 But then the decline accelerated.
4.2 The acceleration was in the early 1980s.
4.3 Students moved into other careers.
4.4 The careers seemed more attractive.

5.1 Experts predict SOMETHING.
5.2 Only 4 percent of the 1986 class will enter teaching. (THAT)
5.3 The teaching is elementary.
5.4 The teaching is secondary.

6.1 SOMETHING is significant. (IT . . . THAT)
6.2 This decline is occurring now.
6.3 The "baby boom" generation reaches parenting age.
6.4 The generation followed World War II. (THAT)

Your writing: In follow-up paragraphs, explain why this decline in the pool of new teachers probably occurred. Consider possible economic, political, or social reasons. Then point to what the "crisis ahead" might be—and how it might be addressed by public policy towards education.

First ask the student for permission to work with his or her sentences in a workshop. Set a positive, constructive tone for the workshop, not a critical one. Following your example, the writer should ask classmates for help on making the piece more interesting to read.

In advance of the workshop, simply decombine the text into its constituent sentences, leaving out all the *ands*. Since the student may have put several independent clauses into one sentence, put all sentences into a single SC cluster. Ask the class to identify "the sentences that could go together." From these revised (more manageable) clusters, students can begin oral combining. Challenge the class to look for ways of combining other than with *and*. Following your earlier demonstration, the writer may decide to select new ways of combining while still retaining some of the *ands*. After all, the writer owns the text.

At upper levels, be prepared for more complex problems than stylistic tinkering. Here, for example, is a passage from an autobiographical assignment written in a freshman-level course. The writer, as you may surmise from his prose, is very reluctant to take risks for fear of being "corrected":

> My Elementary Schooling provided many highlights to my life. I remember learning and practicing writing the alphabet. I found so much pleasure in knowing how to write. The taste of success was sweet.

Clearly, much more than mere combining is required with this student. But SC provides a way into the deeper problem of weak elaboration, which results from writing anxiety.

Put into exercise form for the class to consider—again with the student's permission—the passage looks like this:

> My elementary school provided many highlights.
>
> The highlights were (to/in) my life.
>
> I remember learning the alphabet.
>
> I remember practicing the alphabet.
>
> The practice was writing.
>
> I found much pleasure.
>
> The pleasure was knowing how to write.
>
> The taste of success was sweet.

After students combine these sentences, we shift our attention to elaboration. In this case, students might note key words that could be further developed (*highlights, learning, practicing, pleasure,* and *success*). Questions about these words could help a basic writer to generate more details (in sentence form) for combining.

The next student passage shows the opposite problem, one of clutter and syntactic confusion:

> I don't feel that the simple writing process I used in the ninth grade applies in my life and since choosing the type of career I have been taught to be more concerned with my speech since this will be my most valuable asset. Adding to this the process of reasoning with logic has taught me to think quickly of what to say and how to say it before it is actually said, therefore, I have now found difficulty in writing things as they come to mind.

Analyzed into constituent propositions, the paragraph looks like this:

> I don't feel SOMETHING.
>
> The simple writing process still applies.
>
> I used the writing process in the ninth grade.
>
> The application is in my life.
>
> I have chosen the type of career.
>
> I have been taught to be more concerned with my speech.
>
> Speech will be my most valuable asset.
>
> The process of reasoning is added to this.
>
> The process of reasoning has taught me to think quickly.
>
> The reasoning is with logic.
>
> The thinking is of what to say.
>
> The thinking is of how to say it before it is actually said.
>
> I therefore now have difficulty.
>
> The difficulty is writing things as they come to mind.

As the class tries to combine, concerns will surely arise about the amount of information to be embedded and the logical relations of sentences. The result will be a dramatic "trimming back" (and clarifying) of the original passage. Thus, SC serves aims other than the lengthening of clauses.

7. Using Content-Centered SC (E/SE/MS)

Because of their across-the-curriculum interests, teachers in elementary, middle school, and special education situations can adapt SC to teach content. Content textbooks or units provide material for day-to-day exercises.

Perhaps the place to begin is not with SC but

with "fact sheets." According to Dave Nielsen, a special education teacher in Utah, "fact sheets can be written in minutes and used in many ways—to introduce a topic, reinforce learning, or increase comprehension while helping to improve writing skill." Both the teaching suggestions and the illustrations that follow come from Nielsen.

The fact sheet is a list of facts, all written in predicate phrases. Therefore, each of the fact phrases can be made into a sentence by adding a topic word (a noun). Nielsen says that "the student's first task is to select phrases that make sense together. Then the phrases are combined to form sentences. Finally, the sentences are arranged into a paragraph."

Activity 8 shows Nielsen's fact sheet on whales. When he began experimenting with this approach, he structured the work with fact sheets into levels to accommodate a range of abilities. These levels, moving from easy to fairly complex, made the same sheet useful to all students in a given class. Moreover, they provided a way to monitor the syntactic progress of individual students. Although Nielsen no longer uses these formal levels—relying instead on natural interchange to do the teaching—they may be useful in helping students get started. They appear in chart form in activity 8.

The first step, again, is to select phrases that make sense together. To illustrate the process at level A, you would help students to see that the following phrases might reasonably be grouped:

> Whales . . .
>
> are among the most intelligent animals
>
> range from 4 feet to 100 feet in length
>
> may become extinct
>
> live in all the world's oceans
>
> are social animals
>
> are mammals

The second step is to combine phrases into sentences. At level A, this is pretty straightforward:

> Whales are among the most intelligent animals.
>
> Ranging from 4 feet to 100 feet in length, they live in all the world's oceans.
>
> Whales are mammals.
>
> This social animal may become extinct.

The third step is to arrange sentences into a paragraph. Notice that small wording changes are made here to help the paragraph "hang together":

> Whales are mammals. Ranging from 4 feet to 100 feet in length, they live in all the world's oceans. These mammals are among the most intelligent animals. This social animal may become extinct.

There are several purposes behind all of this, Nielsen writes.

> First, by combining discrete facts into sentences, the student is mastering syntactic manipulations, essential to mastering the higher-order cognitive demands of writing. Second, the student must choose from among all of the facts those most relevant, causing the student to read carefully and to discriminate between essential and unnecessary facts. Third, the student is required to arrange the sentences that have been composed into paragraph form. To do so successfully, young writers need to understand sentence types, sequencing schemes, and the many possibilities of paragraph structure. Fourth, the student is given practice in an important sub-skill of report writing: paraphrasing notes into originally composed sentences and paragraphs. Since report writing is so often assigned in secondary schools, this activity can be an effective way to prepare for or review that skill.

Shown below is another example of a content-centered exercise, this one illustrating unclustered SC. It is called "Planning an Essay Answer." As students deal with this exercise, they can focus on the kinds of sentence targets used with fact sheets.

1. You are taking an essay exam.
2. You should set aside a few moments.
3. You should plan your answer in advance.
4. You should make a list of key points.
5. You intend to cover them in your answer.
6. You can get distracted under pressure.
7. You may leave out important ideas.
8. You know the ideas well.
9. You will refer to your basic list.
10. You will often remember more details.
11. These details will give your essay depth.
12. They will also improve its organization.

By putting this information into fewer sentences, step by step, students develop what Nielsen calls "paraphrase skills." Here's an example:

> (1) If you are taking an essay exam, you should set aside a few moments and plan your answer in advance. (2) Make a list of key points that you intend to cover in your answer. (3) You can get distracted under pressure, leaving out important ideas that you know well. (4) As you refer to your list, you will often remember more details. (5) These details will give your essay depth and improve its organization.

In summary, fact sheets (and content-centered SC) help students learn content and writing skills simultaneously. Such approaches put skill building in the right perspective—functionally tied to content.

8. Using SC as Pattern Practice (E/MS/SE)

Rhythm and rhyme can awaken a sense of language play and an urge to chant with the group. For skill-deficient students, this is very important. The security of participating in a group—not being singled out—allows students to practice language without fear. And the language of the group chant provides a monitor for individual students' own sentences.

The kind of exercise that I propose consists of a simple framework like that shown below. In exercises such as this one, the teacher sets up a target transformation and specifies the pronouns to be used and the tense of the sentence. The group members click their fingers in unison, and the chant begins. In the process of chanting, students will have repeated the target transformation eight times, a fair amount of practice for thirty or forty seconds of work.

In each repetition of the exercise, two *subject* pronouns (from column 1) are chosen; these will go in the slots marked *1* during the drill. Each of these pronouns will have a corresponding *object* form in the drill (from column 2) and a *possessive* form (from column 3). (These go in the slots so marked.) Since the drill is quickly memorized by students, they can concentrate on getting pronouns and verb tenses in standard form.

Rhythm Song

Subjects	*Objects*	*Possessives*
I	me	my
We	us	our
You	you	your
He	him	his
She	her	her
It	it	its
They	them	their

1 give 2 a click.
1 will catch it quick.

1 give 2 the beat.
1 will tap 3 feet.

1 give 2 a song.
1 will hum along.

1 give 2 some jive.
1 will come alive.

1 give 2 some skin.
2 will show 3 grin.

1 give 2 a tune.
1 will start to croon.

1 give 2 the sound.
1 will dance around.

1 give 2 a dime.
1 can have 3 rhyme.

To begin this exercise, you might select the *you* and *I* pronouns with an *If* . . . construction: "If you give me a click, I will catch it quick." The pattern continues down through the drill. A simple reversal of pronouns might then be used with a *When* . . . construction: "When I give you a click, you will catch it quick."

The drill becomes more complex as other tenses and other pronouns are introduced: "Since they gave her a click, she caught it quick." Notice that this pattern will tease out a number of nonstandard usage forms: "she catch"; "she tap"; "she come"; "she have," and so on. As the drill moves into present tense—"We give him a click, and he catches it quick"—the endings again require close attention from speakers of dialects other than standard English. The point, of course, is to help students *hear* deviations so that they can attend to them in writing.

The coordinating conjunctions that work here are *and* and *so*. The useful subordinating conjunctions are *if, as, since, when,* and *while;* also workable (but less rhythmic) are *before, after,* and *because*. The semantics of connectors such as *but, yet, although, where, until,* and *unless* do not make sense in this particular drill. Notice, incidentally, that some conjunctions will work in two positions, others in just one.

The variables, then, are pronouns, conjunctions, and verb tense. Put these three variables together, and a simple exercise becomes very flexible and complex. Obviously, it can also be used to teach certain punctuation patterns.

The difference between SC and conventional pattern practice becomes evident as "nonacademic" students *lead* such a drill. The idea is to internalize standard patterns without the teaching of terminology. As automaticity develops, students can think more about content, less about sentence rules.

ACTIVITY 8

Fact Sheet: Whales

are among the most intelligent animals
have no ears
use sound signals to communicate
use sound signals to navigate
are the largest living creatures
strain plankton from the seawater
are mammals
can sometimes be found in fresh water
have voices
may become extinct
have teeth
eat fish
have fishlike bodies
have paddle-shaped flippers
range in size from the porpoise to the blue whale
can hold their breath up to two hours
are insulated by a layer of blubber, or fat
are aquatic animals
have lungs, not gills
have horizontal tail fins, unlike fish
are different from fish
have thick, smooth skin
can dive to depths of 4,800 feet
do not see very well
range from 4 feet to 100 feet in length
are social animals
may weigh as much as 150 tons
cannot smell
have nose openings, or blow holes, atop their heads
are hunted for oils in their bodies
live in all of the world's oceans

At level	*Students are to*
A	use five facts in no more than four sentences.
B	use ten facts in no more than six sentences.
C	use fifteen facts in no more than eight sentences.
D	use twenty facts in no more than ten sentences.
E	use twenty-five facts in no more than twelve sentences.

9. Exploring Transformations with SC (MS/HS)

To explain transformational principles is probably the wrong approach for most students. Explanations are necessarily abstract. What most students need, at least at first, are concrete illustrations and specific language activities, not high-level generalizations.

In showing students where various modifiers and structures come from, you will probably want to cover the transformations in this kind of a general sequence: (1) coordination in the predicate (verbs, nouns, adjectives, prepositional phrases), then subject coordination, including items in a series; (2) embedding of single and paired modifiers (adjectives, participles, nouns, and compound structures) followed by adverbs and prepositional phrases; (3) subordination (different types of adverbial and relative clauses in various positions); (4) nominalization (of predicate, then of subject), including *it . . . that* and similar constructions; and (5) free modifiers (mainly phrases using participles, appositives, adjective clusters, and absolutes). Deal with deletion transformations—the discarding of redundant information—throughout this sequence.

Shown below are some of the categories I've just mentioned. To create practice material, you can use the class itself as a resource file. After students work through examples beyond these, have them create their own sentences based on the first one in each group. On the road to generalizing, they should swap papers with others for in-class practice. (Notice, incidentally, that each of the following clusters can also be used for regular SC practice—that is, put into a single sentence.)

Adjective Embedding

The teacher was friendly.→the friendly teacher

Her test was unusual.→her _____ test

My grade was excellent.→_____

Noun Embedding

A picnic was for the family.→a family picnic

The lighter was for charcoal.→the _____ lighter

The chicken was for roasting.→_____

Prepositional Phrase Embedding

Cereal was on the stove.→cereal on the stove

Someone was at the door.→someone _____

The cat was in the garbage.→_____

Possessives

Ernestine ran rapidly.→Ernestine's rapid running

Nate jogged easily.→Nate's _____ jogging

I slept soundly.→_____

Relative Clauses

Kim became a writer.→Kim, who became a writer,

She wrote a story.→A story _____ she wrote

I read her story.→_____

Appositives

Mr. T is a professional.→Mr. T, a professional,

Mr. T is a friendly man.→Mr. T, _____,

Mr. T is my TV idol.→_____, _____,

Participial Phrases (-ing *endings*)

I stood in lunch line.→Standing in lunch line,

I watched the cooks.→_____ the cooks,

I lost my appetite.→_____,

Absolutes

His eyes were closed.→His eyes closed,

His mouth was open.→His _____,

His head was on the table.→_____,

Transforming can also be played the other way around. Students can find phrases or dependent clauses in their reading—or in their writing—and take them back to kernel-sentence form. Another enjoyable activity is to work through a series of given phrases, some having built-in ambiguity, as in the list below. Be sure to remind students to include *both* possibilities for those phrases that are ambiguous.

1. washing machine
2. paper plates
3. grass-stained knees
4. Malee's notebook
5. Ed's quick smile
6. swimming fish
7. swimming pool
8. sidewalk sale
9. electric ice maker

10. desirable student jobs
11. boneless turkey breast
12. fluorescent cat collar
13. checkered dress slacks
14. plastic clothing hooks

While SC is seen by many as a skill-drill activity, it doesn't have to be that way. You can set up a framework that encourages diverse responses and have students complete their transformations with predicates from a matching list.

Consider the "agent" framework that appears in activity 9. The mix-and-match quality of this activity produces some zany sentences, of course. And things get better (or worse) as students invent both their own sentences for transformation and their own predicates. Such a game, when put on 3-x-5 cards, might even be a kind of Russian roulette for two-minute fast-writes. Be prepared for giggles and bizarre prose.

Also in activity 9 are other categories of starters for this exercise. These are grouped under semantic sentence roles, not under the usual grammatical classification; there is no need to teach these semantic categories to students. (If you're interested in a grammatical framework for SC exercises, see Lawlor 1983 or Cooper 1973.)

10. Using SC to Teach Grammar (MS/HS/C)

Many textbooks now make explicit the connection between traditional grammar and SC. Since SC provides a concrete referent for discussion, it helps many learners, particularly those for whom abstract grammatical categories are a mystery.

It is worth remembering that most students are *able* to develop complex abstractions. Many so-called slow learners have little difficulty discussing music trends, computer games and programs, or high-performance carburetors. Hands-on experience is the key to developing these abstractions. By the same token, the language manipulation in SC practice provides an experience base for developing formal categories.

For learners of English as a second language (ESL), Vivian Zamel (1980, 84) notes that because these students do not have extensive repertoires in English, they need to be "gradually introduced to key concepts relating to the grammar of the sentence which they can use as references in building sentences or analyzing sentences they have built." Toward this end, Zamel recommends that student writing be the starting point. Student sentences provide a context for introducing "the different types of clauses and the conjunctions (and punctuation) that are used to join them."

Rather than merely presenting a list of conjunctions, Zamel suggests the use of exercise formats that invite attention to the relationship between clauses:

1. _____ she had a headache, she went to bed.
2. _____ she had a headache, she went to the concert.
3. _____ she has a headache, she goes to bed.

Another exercise might provide the conjunction and ask students to fill in an appropriate clause:

1. Since _____, he went to college.
2. He went to college even though _____.
3. As soon as _____, he will go to college.

Zamel then recommends a mix of cued and open SC exercises as well as "generative" sentence building (84).

David M. Davidson (1977a, 51) says that "one of the quickest ways to facilitate such [language] development is through demonstration and practice in specific types of sentence combining." Davidson (1977b) uses an SC diagnostic test, the Test of Ability to Subordinate, to gather data on how well students handle nine grammatical structures: prenominal adjectives; adverbs; prepositional, participial, gerundial, and infinitive phrases; and noun, adverbial, and relative clauses. From this test and from analysis of students' writing, instructional sequences are devised.

Like Zamel, Davidson favors an inductive approach. Instead of beginning with terminology, he asks students to note the "descriptive word" and the thing being described in a series of illustrative sentences. As words are named, students formulate rules about their relative positioning. In conjunction with this rule making, SC helps test student understanding. Picking out incorrect sentences (ones that do not follow a prenominal rule, for example) can also be useful, Davidson says. Further SC practice provides a bridge to writing.

ACTIVITY 9

Mix-and-Match SC

Agent

Winn Chun laughed.
Winn Chun's laughing . . .

Sarah slept.
Sarah's _____ . . .

I ate.
_____ . . .

You procrastinated.
_____ . . .

We collaborated.
_____ . . .

. . . resulted in dentures.
. . . was rather scandalous.
. . . seemed a shame.
. . . eased in later years.
. . . was still evident.
. . . did not seem healthy.
. . . amused the family.
. . . had reached a crisis.
. . . shocked all the teachers.
. . . caused sleepless nights.
. . . could not be denied.
. . . suddenly got better.
. . . took friends by surprise.
. . . proved embarrassing.

Affected

Rachel was welcomed by friends.
Rachel, welcomed by friends, . . .

Mike saw an auto accident.
Mike, _____, . . .

Cause

The teacher disciplined the class.
The teacher, who disciplined the class, . . .

Rick shoved Nick in the pool.
Rick, _____, . . .

Instrument

I used intelligence in school today.
The intelligence I used in school today . . .

Tonya used a computer to write her report.
A computer that _____ . . .

Classifier

Ramona is a little pest.
Ramona, a little pest, . . .

Her mom is a PTA member.
_____, _____, . . .

Source

I got a good grade from my teacher.
My teacher, from whom I got a good grade, . . .

Ernie bought his skates from a friend.
The friend Ernie _____ . . .

Possessor

Kristin had a copper-colored cat.
Kristin's copper-colored cat . . .

The motorcycle belongs to Paulo.
_____ . . .

Goal

We sent flowers to Algernon.
Algernon, to whom we sent flowers, . . .

I sent a rubber duck to Portland.
Portland, where _____, . . .

In regular (non-ESL) classrooms, the best approach is also an inductive one. Ask students to focus on "what is happening" in a brief series of SC exercises—say, on adverb embedding. As students observe that particular words add the *-ly* suffix during combining, the adverb can be introduced. Then students might be directed to look at the characteristics of adverbs. "What does this type of word do?" you might ask. At this point, a conventional textbook treatment of adverbs may begin to make sense.

Activity 10 presents an exercise that uses context clues to provide an inductive introduction to relative clauses. Notice that clues are gradually withdrawn in the exercise and that the directions challenge students to see alternatives to the target structure.

Such an exercise can prompt questions—for example, the use of *which* and *that* as well as the punctuation rules for restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. A good handbook then becomes helpful.

For teachers who prefer to work deductively—beginning with principles and moving to practice—the sequence would be reversed. For example, having gone through a familiar routine on adverbial clauses, you might invite students to categorize subordinators on the basis of meaning—condition, cause/effect, comparison, contrast, time, place, reason—and try them out in SC exercises. You could also discuss emphasis by moving the connectors around.

Similarly, having introduced the term *participial phrase* and discussed how participial phrases function as free modifiers, you might ask students to practice with SC. The following sample exercise is set up in a two-level hierarchy, with the base clause at the left margin and the participial phrases indented.

The teacher gestured wildly.

The teacher stood before the class.

The teacher talked about participial phrases.

1. Gesturing _____,
   the teacher _____,
   talking _____.
2. Talking _____,
   _____,
   the teacher _____.
3. The teacher _____—
   _____,
   _____.
4. The teacher—_____,
   _____—
   stood before the class.

Whatever the target construction, this kind of exercise would help to bridge the gap between terminology in a grammar text and conscious application in a follow-up assignment. Indeed, "bridging" may be what SC does best in some classrooms. (My only caveat is that SC exercises *not* be used for diagramming practice by aficionados of that approach.)

Some summary thoughts follow.

1. Teach only those aspects of grammar that matter. After you teach a concept, ask students to apply it in real writing.
2. Help students to *listen* more closely to language whenever possible. Simple games in sentence imitation and pattern discrimination are a first step.
3. Link visual patterns (for sentences and transformations) to oral work. Make these patterns a part of classroom decor, and refer to them often.
4. Create structured overviews frequently so that students see how the current grammatical concept relates to previously studied material.
5. Use SC as an introduction to a grammatical concept, as a bridge to a writing application, or both. Be sure to name the target concept.
6. Make context clues a part of SC exercises designed to teach grammar. Put punctuation cues in these exercises and draw attention to them.
7. Have students keep structured notebooks in which they record generalizations, examples, exceptions, etc. These notebooks also record the structured overviews.
8. Use "learning logs" so that students can ask questions, summarize, explain to a friend, provide their own examples, and thereby internalize concepts.
9. Treat grammar in an organized way, taking care to simplify terminology, proceed logically, work in small steps, and provide immediate feedback.
10. Remember: memory requires understanding, and understanding requires identifying, sorting, grouping, transforming, and applying.

ACTIVITY 10

School Politician

Directions: Use *who*, *which*, and *that* as connectors. Then do the exercise a second time without using these connecting words.

1.1 Tirebiter stands up abruptly.
1.2 He is running for class president.
_____ , who _____ .
stands _____ .

2.1 He makes a speech.
2.2 It argues for longer lunches.
_____
that _____ .

3.1 His words are fiery.
3.2 They are applauded by students.
_____ , which _____ ,
_____ .

4.1 The teacher quiets the class.
4.2 She is not amused by Tirebiter's speech.
The _____ , _____ ,
_____ class.

5.1 She calls him to her desk.
5.2 It is near the windows.
_____ desk,
_____ .

6.1 The smile is now a frown.
6.2 She usually wears a smile.
The smile _____
_____ frown.

7.1 She asks him about promises.
7.2 He won't be able to keep the promises.

8.1 Tirebiter glances at his classmates.
8.2 They are starting to giggle.

9.1 The look makes him uneasy.
9.2 The teacher wears the look.

10.1 He begins to grin.
10.2 This only deepens her frown.

11.1 The teacher asks her question again.
11.2 She now appears even more unamused.

12.1 Then she glares at the class.
12.2 The class immediately becomes quiet.

11. Using SC for Usage and Mechanics (G)

The key to teaching usage and mechanics is to get problematic sentences in front of students in a workshop setting. To do this, mistakes must be welcomed, not criticized.

Emphasize from the beginning of the workshop that students have an investment only in the *form* of their sentences—how ideas are expressed—not in their content. This fact eliminates much of the usual defensiveness we all feel when our real writing is on public view. In other words, the focus is always on expression *per se*.

Blank transparencies (preferably in frames), lots of chalkboard space, and ditto masters (or photocopying access) are essential for editing work. In advance of a workshop, simply flip through a set of SC papers, searching for problem sentences. Or students can exchange papers and search for sentences that just "don't sound right" to them or that have obvious mechanical errors.

After problem sentences are identified, each student puts a single sentence on a transparency, the chalkboard, or a circulating ditto master. It is these sentences, drawn from the real syntactic problems of real students, that provide the focus for workshop activities.

To repeat an earlier rule: No one laughs at another person's sentence. It is important for students (and teacher) to respect each other's efforts. This respect helps create a positive tone for productive workshops. The same tone is expected for peer editing sessions on real writing.

With this rule in mind, ask students to focus on problem sentences, one at a time. Here are a few from the exercise in activity 3, "Value Judgment":

1. Because she unfolded her paper careful, she didn't want her teacher to see.
2. Time was running out, she had to make up her mine.
3. Carol was working hard on her Test an Sue slip her a note.
4. The note, it asked for help on a important question.
5. Looking down at the paper, her thoughts were about the class's honer system.

All of this is hardly cause for gnashing of teeth. On the contrary, it is more an opportunity—in this case, to do some focused workshop teaching. No need for fill-in-the-blank exercises here; this is the real stuff, done in the students' own handwriting.

In most classes, students have a wealth of collective savvy about writing, and the workshop provides a means of teaching them proofreading and editing skills in a direct, but collaborative, way. By showing students how to do what we expect them to do, they may surprise us—and themselves.

To create personalized SC worksheets more systematically, you need a data base of problem sentences. The easiest way to get these is *not* to write them down when correcting papers. Simply bracket the constructions that you will have students copy on 3-x-5 cards. When papers are handed back for revising, correcting, or conferences, hand out the 3-x-5 cards. Students transcribe the constructions, one problem per card.

From these cards, you will soon begin to accumulate categories of error. The litany is a familiar one: comma splice, run-on sentence, faulty subject/verb agreement, misplaced modifier, vague pronoun reference, faulty parallelism, and so on. Fragments will be rare. The items that you choose as targets will depend on your students' grade level and background and your aims for the future. The main thing is not to try solving all problems at once. Effective teaching requires focus.

From the categorized cards come ditto sheets and transparencies. You can also deal out the cards from time to time and have students solve sentence problems either individually or in small groups. Here are some sample exercises from a college class taught by Robert de Beaugrande (de Beaugrande 1985, 73):

> *Fragment:* I guess that's what makes a classic a classic. The ability to look completely different depending on how it's used.
>
> *Revised:* I guess the ability to look completely different depending on how it's used is what makes a classic a classic.
>
> *Comma splice:* The school didn't financially support the paper, all costs were raised by the journalism class.
>
> *Revised by combining:* The school didn't financially support the paper, since all costs were raised by the journalism class.
>
> *Revised with a period:* The school didn't financially support the paper. All costs were raised by the journalism class.

Vague pronoun reference: They must know what they are doing at all times. This can be quite a problem.

Revised as one sentence: Having to know what they are doing at all times can be quite a problem.

Revised as two sentences: They must know what they are doing at all times. This requirement can be quite a problem.

Redundancy: Polygamy is a marriage in which one person is married to more than one person. A husband would have several wives, or a wife would have several husbands. Either way, the marriage is illegal.

Revised: Polygamy is an illegal marriage in which one spouse has two or more wives or husbands.

By working systematically with real student sentences like these—and by using SC as a revising/editing tool—you may be able to achieve important breakthroughs with your classes.

Mary Besser (1985) works in a similar way, helping basic writers handle absolute constructions. She first begins with SC exercises focused on absolutes, then moves to student writing for application. Her process for identifying fragments (and other surface errors) is shown below:

I. Have the student begin with the *last* sentence in the essay. (This keeps students from mentally "filling in" the way sentences should be.)
II. Have the student read the sentence aloud.
   A. If it can be read easily, have the student continue with the next sentence, working backwards through the essay.
   B. If it cannot be read easily, have the student do the following:
      1. transcribe a verbal paraphrase.
      2. list the main ideas in kernel form.
      3. omit redundant terms and unnecessary information.
      4. recombine the kernels.
      5. reread the sentence aloud.
III. Have the student repeat the above procedures with each sentence until the entire essay has been examined.

When students have good basic skills but remain careless about the details of proofreading, you may want to try a perverse but effective activity. Have each student work through an SC exercise and make a specified number of *deliberate errors* per write-out. At the end of ten minutes, students will have created "worksheets" for each other—and, once again, it is the students who are the answer key.

In this activity, students exchange papers and attempt to circle, label, and correct the deliberate errors. An exercise with ten sentences (and three errors per sentence) would be worth thirty points. The author of the worksheet is responsible for determining how many points his or her partner has earned. Also, of course, it is the partner who does the "teaching" about basic skills.

Using the same approach, you can also construct problem sentences to accompany SC exercises, like those found in activity II. Such an exercise format also provides a way to focus on target errors and to suggest remedies in a large-group situation.

How does such work affect scores on competency tests? According to Bonnie Leslie, an administrative director in the Ysleta Schools of El Paso, district scores on a statewide basic skills test showed sharp improvement as teachers began working with SC in a concerted way. This effect was particularly dramatic in schools with large numbers of ESL students.

What follows are summary thoughts on teaching usage and mechanics, some gleaned from Gerry Camp of the Bay Area Writing Project:

1. Put editing work in the right perspective—as a final step in the writing process, not as the place where one begins.
2. Discuss the value judgments that readers quickly make about a piece of writing on the basis of errors in usage and mechanics.
3. Clarify that *revising* refers to work on content and organization, while *editing* refers to the final act of shaping, trimming, and proofreading sentences.
4. Put students in groups to see how many errors they can spot on their own. Make a bulletin board display of "wacko sentences" to heighten proofreading awareness.
5. Focus on the usage skills that matter and teach these. After teaching a skill, ask students to apply it by revising drafts of their real writing.
6. Remember that merely identifying errors will not change a student's writing behavior. Someone must tell the student what to do.
7. Tell each student *one* thing to work on in the next paper. Remind yourself that your job is to teach the student, not to fix the paper.

ACTIVITY 11

SC Exercise with Problem Sentences

Directions: Circle and label each of the *three* errors in the problem sentence. Then rewrite it in a better way.

The surgeon said SOMETHING cuttingly.
She was "the knife of the party." (, _____ ,)
She had operated on a comedian. (THAT)
The comedian had a sense of humor. (WITH)
The sense of humor was "infectious."
She had removed his "appundix."

Problem: The surgeon, the "knife of the party" said cuttingly that she had operated on a Comedian with an "infectious" sense of humor, she had removed his "appundix."

Rewrite: _____

_____ .

8. Don't correct errors in mechanics on early drafts if you expect revision of content. Don't teach students to make errors they don't already make.
9. Use tape-recorded grading. Have students number the lines on their papers for easy reference, listen to your taped comments, and *mark their own errors.*
10. Don't teach the class what some students already know. Instead, have students who know teach those who don't. Use students as your usage consultants.

12. Teaching Lean, Direct Writing with SC (HS/C)

The aim of SC pedagogy is *not* to teach long sentences. The goal centers instead on syntactic control—shaping prose to match the writer's intention. The direction of this control, once students have acquired a fair degree of automaticity, fluency, self-confidence, and willingness to risk in writing, is probably toward *tighter* sentences. "Simplify! Simplify!" Thoreau once advised.

To teach lean, direct prose, you need guidelines. And probably the leanest, most direct book on the subject is still *The Elements of Style* (1979) by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, now in its third edition. The book balances Strunk's crisp, no-nonsense commands—"Omit needless words"—with White's clear explanations and analogies. For sheer readability and common sense, you will enjoy William Zinsser's *On Writing Well* (1985), also in its third edition. Richard Lanham's *Revising Business Prose* (1981) and Joseph Williams's *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (1981) are popular college texts.

A bulletin board with the advice of William Strunk (1979, 23) would be a good place to begin classroom discussion:

> Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell. (63 words)

You and your students might add the advice of other writers to the board during the semester.

Another board can be reserved for continuing examples of technically correct but dreadful prose, preferably in single sentences. Name the board whatever you like: the Slagheap of English Syntax, a Miasmic Morass of Monstrous Musings, or Center for the Study of Rotten Writing.

On this board should be poorly written sentences that students have found in newspapers, magazines, textbooks, or school announcements. The entire world of printed language is fair game. Once students begin enjoying the board—"Hey, can you believe somebody *wrote* this?"—they might even put up some of their *own* less-than-eloquent efforts. And you might also. (Each student decides individually whether to achieve a moment of notoriety, if not class fame, by publishing a sentence or two.)

Here are a few principles of modern prose style that could help to focus SC practice as well as revision/editing work:

1. Use active verbs; avoid the passive voice wherever possible.
2. Choose straightforward wording over pretentious or trendy diction.
3. Trim adjectives and adverbs, particularly the vague, obvious, and redundant ones.
4. Reduce clauses to phrases and phrases to one-word modifiers.
5. Rework sentences that are bloated with abstract nouns; shorten noun phrases wherever possible.
6. Eliminate unneeded qualifiers and pile-ups of prepositional phrases.
7. Make shifts in direction clear with explicit signal words.

Activity 12 has some SC exercises based on these suggestions. Students create the preceding rules (or something close to them) by rewriting flabby prose into lean, direct sentences.

Like traditional practice, this approach compares good and not-so-good sentences. But traditional reading of sentences tends to be passive, even when the contrast is a vivid one. Here, each SC problem challenges students to do better than the given sentence. When reasonable guidelines (or direct teaching) accompany this revising and editing, students will gradually shape sentences toward a clearer, more vigorous style.

Better writing results from this shaping, but even more important is the tonic effect on thinking. Flabby or windy prose often conceals a string of vague thoughts or cognitive shortcuts. By stripping sentences to their bare essentials, a writer sees the message (or lack of message) more clearly. This kind of back-to-the-basics approach we can all support.

The tactic, then, is to pull out *essential* constituent sentences from a longer sentence or two. Working from the given sentences, students will immediately produce a sentence superior to the original. But when this practice is coupled with clear principles for revision, the activity becomes even more effective. The rules reinforce writing-by-ear intuitions.

Side-by-side comparisons can be constructed from regular SC exercises. John Platt at the Pingry School in Martinsville, New Jersey, recommends this approach to help students understand writing principles that they can then apply.

When students understand these principles, have them share with the class "before" and "after" sample sentences from their real writing. Include your own revisions in these discussions. These before and after samples could be displayed side-by-side on a bulletin board.

To create whole-discourse SC focused on sentence economy, you might have a good student assume the persona of pompous bureaucrat when combining sentences. The goal? To thicken up prose until it begins to curdle. Use this obfuscatory version as you challenge your students to write lean, direct prose from the same exercise.

Let me conclude this section with activity 13, a brief exercise for you to try on your own, applying the earlier suggestions for lean, direct writing. (Incidentally, and just for the gender record, go-go dancers aren't necessarily women.)

As mentioned in the Theory and Research section, clause expansion culminates in the *tightening* of language. Therefore, exercises that encourage students to "say the same thing in fewer words" are not only appropriate but theoretically essential.

Practice in a controlled setting should be accompanied by sound advice on writing style. Then students should apply what they are learning to their own drafts.

13. Focusing on Style with SC (HS/C)

To help upper-level students profit from SC, you can present the principle of sentence variety—in length and in structure. Students need to understand that, on occasion, sentences may be more effective *un*combined. Short sentences can create emphasis or improve clarity.

Consider starting with a demonstration. Read aloud from an SC exercise in two forms—first uncombined, then combined into a series of long, monotonous sentences that follow the same basic pattern. Help the class to see that both versions have serious readability problems.

Challenge the class to vary sentence length as a first step. This usually produces clear gains in readability, particularly as students recover pronouns and key words from context. Then ask the class to apply what they have learned from SC to vary the structure of sentences. Stress the use of *openers* and *interrupters*. If students have had experience reducing clauses to phrases or free modifiers, you should remind them of these approaches.

Work of this kind makes an interesting bulletin board display, helping to emphasize the point behind SC activities. Put choppy sentences on one side, and long, unvaried sentences on the other. In between the two extremes—on center stage, so to speak—are the versions that students have created. As students read their own versions, they also see how others have altered sentence length and structure.

Another stylistic principle is parallelism. To introduce this topic, you might read from the prose of Martin Luther King, Jr., or refer to Francis Christensen's "coordinate sequence" paragraphs in *Notes toward a New Rhetoric* (1967). Discuss the principle of expressing like things in like ways—for example, in lists and series—and emphasize that parallelism can create heightened emphasis. Warn that parallelism can draw attention to itself if overdone—and that it may prove distracting, even irritating, to readers who want to process text quickly.

Here is an unclustered recombining exercise from Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* that could be used to follow an introductory discussion of parallelism:

1. Revivals were always affairs.
2. The affairs were very serious.
3. The affairs were gay.
4. The affairs were long-planned for.
5. They brought pots from shelves.
6. They brought pans from shelves.
7. The shelves were out-of-the-way.
8. They brought dresses from chests.
9. They brought pants from chests.
10. The dresses were mothball-packed.
11. The pants were creased.
12. The chests were hidden.
13. They brought all the people.
14. The people were from the community.
15. The people were from neighboring communities.

ACTIVITY 12

Rules for Stronger Sentences

Directions: Study the SC exercise, then read the accompanying problem sentence. Use the exercise to rewrite in a clear, direct way. Count your words and compare with the problem sentence.

1. Use active verbs.
   Avoid the passive voice.
   Avoidance is wherever possible.

Problem: Verbs that are characterized by activity are to be used, and the passive type of voice is, wherever it is at all possible, to be avoided. (26 words)

Rewrite: _____

_____ .

2. Choose wording.
   The wording is straightforward.
   Don't choose diction.
   The diction is pretentious.
   The diction is trendy.

Problem: Wording which has the extraordinarily important quality of straightforwardness is to be chosen over diction which is self-consciously or even, for that matter, *un*consciously pretentious *per se;* by the same token, with-it (or, shall we say, trendy) diction just doesn't cut it, writing-wise. (45 words)

Rewrite: _____

_____ .

3. Trim adjectives.
   Trim adverbs.
   Trim vague ones in particular.
   Trim obvious ones in particular.
   Trim redundant ones in particular.

Problem: It is extremely, indeed vitally, important to trim extra and excessive adjectival and adverbial modifiers, most particularly the vague, general, empty ones; the obvious, needless, and unessential ones; and last, but most assuredly not least, the inanely repetitious and/or redundant ones. (42 words)

Rewrite: _____

_____ .

ACTIVITY 12 (continued)

4. Reduce clauses to phrases.
   Reduce phrases to modifiers.
   The modifiers have one word.

Problem: There are a lot of clauses in the sentence that can go through a process of reduction to become phrases, and there are also any number of phrases with a function of modification that can be reduced to one word. (40 words)

Rewrite: _____

_____ .

5. Rework sentences.
   The sentences have abstract nouns.
   The abstract nouns are bloated.
   Shorten noun phrases.
   Shortening is wherever possible.

Problem: It is suggested that the bloating of the structure of nominalization is cause for the reworking of the noun phrase component of the sentential unit in the direction of abbreviating said structure wherever it is at all possible. (38 words)

Rewrite: _____

_____ .

ACTIVITY 13

The Tattoo Artist

Directions: The problem sentence is technically correct but poorly written. Rewrite it in a clear, direct way, using the fewest possible words.

A tattoo artist had designs.
The artist was "withdrawn."
The designs were wild.
The designs were on a go-go dancer.
The dancer worked at the Polar Bar.
The Polar Bar was in Kodiak, Alaska.

Problem: An individual who was somewhat "withdrawn" and who worked in the field of tattoo artistry had what might possibly have been termed "wild designs" on a go-go dancer whose place of employment was, reportedly, the Polar Bar, which is located in the city of Kodiak, in the state of Alaska. (50 words)

Rewrite: _____

_____ .

16. The people came up the school road.
17. The road was winding.
18. The road was red.
19. The people came to the Great Faith Church.
20. The revival ran for seven days.
21. It was an occasion.
22. Everyone looked forward to it.
23. It was more than just church services.
24. It was the year's only event.
25. The event was social.
26. The event was planned.
27. It disrupted the humdrum of everyday life.
28. The life was in the country.

In scanning the exercise, you no doubt spot opportunities for parallelism at the discourse level. Such opportunities also exist at the phrase and word level. Let's examine one student's transformations:

> (1) Revivals were always serious, but they were also gay and long-planned-for affairs. (2) They brought pots and pans from out-of-the-way shelves. (3) They brought mothball-packed dresses and creased pants from hidden chests. (4) They brought all the people from the community (neighboring ones included) up the red and winding road to the Great Faith Church. (5) The revival ran for seven days. (6) It was an occasion that everyone looked forward to. (7) It was more than just church services. (8) It was the year's only planned social event. (9) The revival disrupted the humdrum of everyday life in the country.

Working from the student text, you can point out examples of discourse parallelism in sentences 2, 3, and 4, and in 6, 7, and 8. The effect of parallelism in the first set is a kind of building emphasis. Then the student uses contrast—a short sentence with *revival* as the head word. This begins the second set of parallel sentences, each an elaboration of the preceding one. The final sentence returns to *revival* as a head word and nicely closes the paragraph.

You can discuss in context how sentences 5 and 9 keep the parallelism from becoming monotonous while still maintaining the focus of the paragraph. You can also show how the pronouns *they* and *it* point to an antecedent reference word, thus "chaining" the text. In this regard, you might mention how synonyms can be an alternative to parallelism for text cohesion. Finally, you can analyze individual sentences, noting coordinate structures within sentences 1, 2, 3, and 4 that provide a feeling of "balance."

Then look at the original version and ask the class to point out balance within its sentences. At the same time, show how Taylor uses subordination—the *which* connector in sentence 1, the *for* connector and the participial phrase in sentence 2—to achieve a different stylistic effect.

> (1) Revivals were always very serious, yet gay and long-planned-for, affairs which brought pots and pans from out-of-the-way shelves, mothball-packed dresses and creased pants from hidden chests, and all the people from the community and the neighboring communities up the winding red school road to Great Faith Church. (2) The revival ran for seven days and it was an occasion everyone looked forward to, for it was more than just church services; it was the year's only planned social event, disrupting the humdrum of everyday country life. (233–34)

To address issues of style in a more deductive fashion, you might refer to standard handbooks and rhetoric texts. There you will find advice on a range of matters—balance, clarity, economy, emphasis, coherence, sentence openers, and so on. By focusing on these principles one at a time and by having the class practice them in SC exercises, you improve the probability that students will consider them as they revise real texts. (For a demonstration of such principles, see Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg 1978.)

Francis Christensen's ideas, as outlined in "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," can also serve as a point of departure for productive work with SC exercises. Christensen (1981, 353) writes that "the rhythm of good modern prose comes about equally from the multiple-tracking of coordinate constructions and the down-shifting and backtracking of free modifiers." While coordination comes naturally, free modifiers need "coaxing along," Christensen argues.

In the following tour de force, Christensen defines a possible target for writing instruction:

> The typical sentence of modern English, the kind we can best spend our efforts trying to teach, is what we may call the *cumulative sentence*. The main clause, which may or may not have a sentence modifier before it, advances the discussion; but the additions move backward, as in this clause, to modify the statement of the main clause or more often to explicate or exemplify it, so that the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement, advancing to a new position and then pausing to consolidate it, leaping

> and lingering as the popular ballad does. The first part of the preceding compound sentence has one addition, placed within it; the second part has 4 words in the main clause and 49 in the five additions placed after it. (355–56)

Christensen's method focuses attention on the *position* of sentence modifiers—before, within, or after the base clause. It also identifies the *type* of free modifiers, labeling them as subordinate clause, relative clause, noun cluster, verb cluster, adjective cluster, adjective series, absolute, or prepositional phrase. Finally, it shows the *relation* of free modifiers to the base clause and to each other.

To illustrate how such matters might be made tangible to students, let's consider activity 14, an SC exercise that provides abundant opportunities for practice of target constructions. (You would point out to the class, of course, that these are just exercises, not an admonition to write *all* cumulative sentences in real writing.)

Tackling cluster 1 in straightforward fashion, many students will produce a safe, coordinate series:

> (1a) He leaned forward, gathered speed and momentum, swooped over a low crest to the left under the lift cable, and brought his skis together.

But if you focus class discussion on the use of participles as sentence openers, students can learn to give this sentence a different emphasis, one that moves:

> (1b) Leaning forward, gathering speed and momentum while swooping over a low crest to the left, under the lift cable, he brought his skis together.

On their own with cluster 2, students might produce a sentence that relies mainly on subordinate clauses:

> (2a) His body was angular and bent at the waist as he pressed toward the trail, which was a long and open stretch of snow where moguls were outlined by shadows.

But if you focus on free modifiers, such as noun clusters and absolutes, a student might well produce this:

> (2b) His body was angular and bent at the waist as he pressed toward the trail—a long and open stretch of snow, its moguls outlined by shadows.

Such an exercise enables students to practice different writing styles, compare their effects, and experiment with new constructions. Some students will ultimately opt for a plain or balanced style, others for a style that emphasizes occasional cumulative sentences. The point is for students to see and hear many possible options and then make choices.

Here is my final version of the passage. See if you can do better.

> (1) He leaned forward, gathering speed and momentum, bringing his skis together as he swooped over a low crest to the left, under the lift cable. (2) Angular and bent at the waist, he pressed toward the trail, a long and open stretch of snow with moguls outlined by shadows. (3) He dipped one pole, unweighted, and traversed in a birdlike arc—then dipped again, realtering the ratio of speed and balance, feeling the snow beneath his edges. (4) It swirled around his knees, white and powdery, its crystals catching the light and making a faint plume that he could see in his fast-moving shadow. (5) With his knees locked tight, skis together, his body was relaxed yet alert, senses processing the taut, downhill harmony.

In sharing such a version with a class, talk frankly—and simply—about why you made certain choices. You will surely want to stress the dangers of overdoing sentence openers, interrupters, and final free modifiers. Additions used as openers and interrupters are particularly susceptible to abuse.

14. Enhancing Appreciation through Recombining (G)

As noted earlier, you can focus on prose-as-product with recombining exercises drawn from good writing. Break the sentences down into smaller ones, though not necessarily kernel sentences. Then decide what you want students to learn from the exercise and how you will introduce it.

Suppose, for example, that a student has just written a fine piece of narrative. The usual approach would be to read the selection aloud to the class. While this compliments the writer, wouldn't more be accomplished if students were involved in *constructing* the narrative?

Ask the writer's permission to create an SC exercise from a portion of the piece. Focus on a key paragraph such as this one:

> My cat was barely breathing at the bottom of the cardboard box. He lifted his head a little and looked up at me. He didn't meow. I wanted to pick him up, but I knew it would hurt him more. I just sat there in the garage and talked to him a little. Then I smoothed his silky fur with my fingers. It was getting cold and starting to rain when my mom called me in for supper. "I have to go now," I said. The cat didn't look up.

ACTIVITY 14

The Skier

1.1 He leaned forward.
1.2 He gathered speed.
1.3 He gathered momentum.
1.4 He swooped over a low crest.
1.5 The crest was to the left.
1.6 The crest was under the lift cables.
1.7 He brought his skis together.

2.1 His body was angular.
2.2 It was bent at the waist.
2.3 He pressed toward the trail.
2.4 The trail was a stretch of snow.
2.5 The stretch was long and open.
2.6 Its moguls were outlined by shadows.

3.1 He dipped one silver pole.
3.2 He unweighted.
3.3 He traversed in a birdlike arc.
3.4 He then dipped again.
3.5 He realtered the ratio of speed.
3.6 He realtered the ratio of balance.
3.7 He felt the snow beneath his edges.

4.1 It swirled around his knees.
4.2 It was white and powdery.
4.3 Its crystals caught the light.
4.4 They made a faint plume.
4.5 He could see it in his shadow.
4.6 His shadow was fast-moving.

5.1 His knees were locked tight.
5.2 His skis were together.
5.3 His body was relaxed.
5.4 His body was alert.
5.5 His senses processed the downhill harmony.
5.6 The harmony was taut.

Then decombine the passage into kernel (or near-kernel) sentences:

The cat was barely breathing.
He was at the bottom of the box.
The box was cardboard.
He lifted his head a little.
He looked up at me.
He didn't meow.
I wanted to pick him up.
I knew that it would hurt him more.
I just sat there.
I was in the garage.
I talked to him a little.
I smoothed his fur.
His fur was silky.
I used my fingers.
It was getting cold.
It was starting to rain.
My mom called me in for supper.
"I have to go now," I said.
The cat didn't look up.

To introduce this unclustered SC exercise, you might ask the class to think about musical rhythms. What is an upbeat rhythm? What is its opposite? What are their parallels in writing? What sort of writing rhythm might best describe an angry exchange between two people? And what about a very serious scene, one involving an injured animal?

There are no "right" answers to such questions. The point is for students to think about sentence length as a key factor in the rhythm and mood of writing. As students are given the exercise, they might be asked to first skim its sentences and then decide on the effect they want to convey. Or an interview with the author might reveal his or her intentions. In either case, students will *listen* as they combine sentences. After working with the exercise, students get to see and hear the original.

Or suppose that you are working with a character sketch assignment. The usual approach, perhaps, is to study prose models and to discuss with students how character is revealed in writing. More inductively, you might ask students what makes the following sketch from Mark Singer's "Court Buff" interesting to read.

> In all sorts of circumstances, certain people in Brooklyn will commit murder. This fact fascinates Benjamin Shine more than it appalls him. Shine is a peaceable gentleman from Borough Park who would hate to be asked which he prefers—a sunny afternoon stroll alongside the Belt Parkway with his wife, Tillie, or a dukes-up double-murder trial. He is a self-taught student of the behavior of criminals, innocents, witnesses, lawyers, judges, and jurors. He is a court buff. . . . Most weekdays, a dozen or more buffs show up at the State Supreme Court Building on Cadman Plaza, in downtown Brooklyn. Shine attends as regularly as any back-seat jurisconsult in the borough. (46)

With the following exercise as context, you can now ask students to look at Singer's second paragraph and to note how their principles for an interesting character sketch are worked in here. Have them recombine these sentences and compare their versions with Singer's original.

1. Shine has lived in Brooklyn.
   This is for most of his seventy-three years.
   He is no provincial.
2. He acknowledges something.
   The other boroughs have bred their own miscreants.
   The boroughs are in New York City.
3. He has spent the past dozen years.
   He watched criminal trials in Brooklyn.
   He has found it sensible to become a specialist.
   He has found it convenient to become a specialist.
4. There is a consequence.
   He takes more interest in a corpse.
   It was deposited in an airshaft in Flatbush.
   He takes less interest in a corpse.
   It turned up in the trunk of an automobile.
   The automobile was at La Guardia Airport.
   It turned up in a vacant lot.
   The lot is near Hunts Point.
5. Shine realizes something.
   In addition to murderers there are antisocial types out there.
   They have the capacity for rape.
   They have the capacity for theft.
   They have the capacity for burglary.
   They have the capacity for kidnapping.

They have the capacity for arson.

They have the capacity for aimless mayhem.

(Overlapping of course occurs at times.)

He devotes most of his time to homicides.

6. He is not ghoulish.

   He is merely curious.

7. He says something quite accurately.

   "There's murder."

   "You know something's doing."

Here is Singer's original paragraph. As students work their way through a sentence-by-sentence comparison of their version to the original, they will attend to features such as setting, specific details, and dialogue. You, in turn, can point to active voice and variety in sentences. With such preparation, students see what a character sketch is all about—and prewriting begins in earnest.

> (1) Although Shine has lived in Brooklyn for most of his seventy-three years, he is no provincial. (2) He acknowledges that the other boroughs of New York City have bred their own miscreants. (3) Having spent the past dozen years watching criminal trials—mainly murder trials—in Brooklyn, however, he has found it sensible and convenient to become a specialist. (4) Consequently, he takes more interest in a corpse that has been deposited in an airshaft in Flatbush than in one that has turned up in a trunk of an automobile at La Guardia Airport or in a vacant lot near Hunts Point. (5) Shine realizes that in addition to murderers there are anti-social types out there who have the capacity for rape, theft, burglary, kidnapping, arson, or aimless mayhem—at times, of course, overlapping occurs—but he devotes most of his attention to homicides. (6) He is not ghoulish, merely curious. (7) "Where there's murder," he often says, quite accurately, "you know something's doing." (46)

Here is a third sample of recombining, this time in the area of poetry. The exercise comes from the opening of "Dover Beach," a famous nineteenth-century poem by Matthew Arnold.

It is night.

The sea is calm.

The tide is full.

The moon is fair.

The moon lies upon the straits.

A light gleams.

The light is on the French coast.

The light is gone.

The cliffs of England stand.

The cliffs are glimmering.

The cliffs are vast.

The cliffs are in the bay.

The bay is tranquil.

Come to the window.

Sweet is the night air.

There is a line of spray.

The line is long.

The sea meets the land.

The moon has blanched the land.

Listen.

You hear the roar.

The roar is grating.

The roar is pebbles.

The waves draw back.

The waves fling the pebbles.

The waves return up the strand.

The strand is high.

The roar begins.

The roar ceases.

Its cadence is slow.

Its cadence is tremulous.

It brings a note in.

The note is eternal.

The note is sadness.

In introducing this exercise, ask students to picture themselves by the sea, listening to its relentless rhythms. They should remember that it is a time of turbulence for many people. Among other things, the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* has shaken the very foundations of society. The waves come in, over and over. How can we capture their rhythm in words?

Some students come very close to the original text when doing this exercise. But whatever their level of success in transforming kernels into rhythmic language, all students attend closely to Arnold's language—and that, of course, is the point of recombining. Students are *processing* the poem—constructing it, actually—and in quite a different way from their regular reading. Thus, recombining helps make poetry (and stylistic analysis) more accessible to students.

Here is the opening of Arnold's "Dover Beach" so that you can make your personal recombining comparison:

> The sea is calm to-night.
> The tide is full, the moon lies fair
> Upon the straits;—on the French coast the light
> Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand
> Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
> Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
> Only, from the long line of spray
> Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
> Listen! you hear the grating roar
> Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
> At their return, up the high strand,
> Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
> With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
> The eternal note of sadness in.

This approach also works well for prose selections. In introducing fiction, try decombining an opening paragraph and asking students to deal with it. As various versions are discussed, have students predict what they think the story might be about. Then show them the original version. A comparison of the two leads naturally into a reading of the selection or into other prereading activities. Thanks to recombining, many students attend more closely to an author's language as they read the piece.

Vince Wixon, at Crater High School in Ashland, Oregon, uses all of these approaches and more. He sometimes has students develop poems from prose SC passages and ties SC to work with literary models. Recombining and prewriting activities blend together in his writing classes.

15. Using "Dewriting" and Imitation (MS/HS/C)

An additional SC technique, "dewriting," deserves attention if you are looking for a beyond-the-basics approach. Like recombining exercises, a dewritten passage is prepared from a target text, usually literature or professional nonfiction. Typically it consists of only base clauses; no modifiers are included.

Students project themselves imaginatively into the exercise and use prewriting activities to invent details that fill in a discourse frame. For many students, dewriting proves engaging because two levels of comparison are involved—first with their peers, then with a skilled professional.

To illustrate dewriting, here is an example derived from a beautifully crafted passage from John McPhee's "Travels in Georgia." The focus is on Zebra, a Georgia rattlesnake:

> The gerbil began to walk around. Zebra gave no sign that he was aware. The gerbil explored Zebra's domain. The gerbil stepped up onto Zebra's back. Still Zebra did not move. Zebra had been known to refuse a meal. Perhaps that would happen now. The gerbil walked along the snake's back. It stepped down. It continued along the boundary. The strike came. The strike was so fast. The snake lanced across the distance. The gerbil fell dead.

Students "go inside" this scene to picture particulars; these are used to expand the given base clauses. The dewritten passage is a kind of skeleton, a narrative frame in this case. Here is McPhee's original prose, mirroring the action in its cadence and taut control. Notice how McPhee's use of descriptive detail fills in the frame.

> The gerbil began to walk around the bottom of the big glass jar. Zebra, whose body was arranged in a loose coil, gave no sign that he was aware of the gerbil's presence. Under a leaf, over a rock, sniffing, the gerbil explored the periphery of Zebra's domain. Eventually, the gerbil stepped up onto Zebra's back. Still Zebra did not move. Zebra had been known to refuse a meal, and perhaps that would happen now. The gerbil walked along the snake's back, stepped down, and continued along the boundary of the base of the jar, still exploring. Another leaf, another stone, the strike came when the gerbil was perhaps eight inches from Zebra's head. The strike was so fast, the strike and the recovery, that it could not really be followed by the eye. Zebra lanced across the distance, hit the gerbil in the heart, and, all in the same instant, was back where he had started, same loose coil, head resting just where it had been resting before. The gerbil took three steps forward and fell dead, so dead it did not even quiver, tail out straight behind.(81)

The act of comparing, not a search for the right answer, helps students to pay attention to writing. Both recombining and dewriting require sentence-by-sentence comparison.

To focus on sentence imitation in context, you might try using a cloze exercise like the following, which was taken from the opening of John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*. For this, students were given key structure words and asked to fill in their own ideas.

In comparing the student text that follows with the Steinbeck original, notice how a sophomore at San Fernando High School appropriates syntax. (The underlined words are the student's own; the others are the context cues provided.) Pay special attention to the absolute construction, "her silk dress over her thin body and her briefcase in her small hands." Steinbeck's language is doing the teaching.

John Steinbeck

Kino awakened in the near dark. The stars still shone and the day had drawn only a pale wash of light in the lower sky to the east. The roosters had been crowing for some time, and the early pigs were already beginning their ceaseless turning of twigs and bits of wood to see whether anything to eat had been overlooked. Outside the brush house in the tuna clump, a covey of little birds chittered and flurried with their wings.

Kino's eyes opened, and he looked first at the lightening square which was the door and then he looked at the hanging box where Coyotito slept. And last he turned his head to Juana, his wife, who lay beside him on the mat, her blue head shawl over her nose and over her breasts and around the small of her back. Juana's eyes were open too. Kino could never remember seeing them closed when he awakened. Her dark eyes made little reflected stars. She was looking at him as she was always looking at him when he awakened.(3)

Student Imitation

Steve awakened in the cold early morning. The street lights still shone and the moon had begun to fade away by the gleaming shine of the tender sun. The dogs had been barking for some time, and the ice-covered cars had already started their usual coughing sound before they were ready to engage in the never ending stream of traffic to the city. Outside the two-story brick house a waste-truck was parked and had begun its weekly duty for that neighborhood.

Steve's eyes opened, and he looked first at the glowing numbers on the panel which was the clock and then he looked at the new bamboo crib where Chris slept. And last he turned his head to JoAnn, his wife, who sat beside him in the bed, her silk dress over her thin body and her briefcase in her thin hands. JoAnn's eyes were open too. Steve could never remember seeing her asleep or holding their baby when he awakened. Her busy lifestyle bothered Steve. She was always on the phone or getting ready for a business trip when he awakened.

Helen Lodge, of California State University–Northridge, reports that in the composition assignment that followed, "students had to go beyond the Steinbeck imitation in order to complete a short narrative of their own. In their compositions students used longer sentences and attempted more mature syntax."

Let's now consider how such ideas might work in another high school or college situation. You want to help students describe a place vividly. The key to such description is, of course, significant detail, but you need to do more than say this. You need to show students how particulars do the work of prose.

And so you begin with a prewriting discussion of southern California. The results, gleaned from TV if not from being there, will be a predictable list: freeways, great weather, smog, lots of people, palm trees, Hollywood glamor, "open" life-style, surfing, ethnic mix, and so on. Fine, you say. Now let's suppose that we want to write a piece about a lurid crime in the San Bernadino valley, and we want to set the scene so vividly that the reader is snared. How can we do this? With significant details.

You give the class the following starters from Joan Didion's "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream," a slight variation on the imitation approach:

> This is the California where . . . . This is the country of the . . . . The future always looks . . . . Here is where the . . . . Here is the last stop for all those who . . . . Here is where they are trying to find a . . . .

And then students set to work with their prewriting lists. After developing drafts, they compare their paragraphs in small groups. Each group selects one to share, perhaps even to "publish" on a ditto sheet for the following session. You can help the class to compare these strong pieces of writing with Joan Didion's prose. The recurring point of comparison? Significant details. Here is Didion's original:

> This is the California where it is easy to Dial-A-Devotion, but hard to buy a book. This is . . . the country of the teased hair and the Capris and the girls for whom all life's promise comes down to a waltz-length white wedding dress and the birth of a Kimberly or a Sherry or a Debbi and a Tijuana divorce and a return to hairdressers' school. . . . The future always looks good in the golden land, because no one remembers the past. Here is where the hot wind blows and the old ways do not seem relevant, where the divorce rate is double the national average and where one person in every thirty-eight lives in a trailer. Here is the last stop for all those who come from somewhere else, for all those who have drifted away from the cold and the past and the old way. Here is where they are trying to find a new life style, trying to find it in the only places they know how to look: the movies and the newspapers. (4)

Working in this way, you are likely to activate students' attention to your target skill.

For an able class, you might also consider this idea. Set up *three* recombining or dewriting exercises from a single writer. On the first exercise, have

students work alone, not discussing how their versions compare with the original text. On the second exercise, have students again recombine (or elaborate) and then compare, this time verbalizing features of the writer's style that seem to be emerging. Put these features on the board as hypotheses to be tested in the third exercise. Working with the class as a group, try the third exercise and again compare.

Once the class has begun to internalize the style of Lewis Thomas, Alice Walker, E. B. White, or Rachel Carson—or someone in this semester's syllabus—you might invite students to *become* another voice temporarily. After a typical prewriting activity, they should try to emulate a writer whose work they admire.

16. Generating Ideas with SC (MS/HS/C)

SC seems mainly a tool for revising and editing practice, not a tool for prewriting. But in addition to the dewriting approach described above, certain "generative" ideas are certainly worth exploring with students.

The most basic generative idea of all is the "bookends" principle. Any pair of SC clusters (or sentences) are like bookends; that is, students can put sentences *between* the given examples. This principle is basic to revision that generates new connections or more content. We often put new information *into* an existing language structure to shape it toward some emerging conception.

Here, for example, is a fiction-writing format that uses three given sentences (in either cued or open format) as prompts for student writing. The directions are simple: include these transformed sentences (in any order) somewhere in a narrative. Notice how sentences in "The City" shift meaning in the following contexts: (1) a science-fiction story about a nuclear (or natural) disaster, (2) a story of young soldiers in a combat zone, (3) a story told by a psychiatric patient in a mental hospital.

The City

1. We set up our equipment.
   We made some measurements.
   The measurements were preliminary.
   We prepared ourselves mentally.
2. The city lay in the valley.
   The city was ravaged.
   The valley was treeless.
   Smoke still rose in columns.
3. We stumbled forward.
   We surveyed the destruction.
   We understood something.
   Our training had been top-secret. (WHY)

The following exercise worked even better:

The Jungle

1. I ran into the swamp.
   Ooze flowed over my boots.
   The ooze was slimey.
   I felt myself begin to sink.
2. Tree limbs shaded the jungle.
   The tree limbs were vine-covered.
   The jungle was steaming.
   I would have to cross the jungle alone.
3. Darkness settled in.
   Mosquitoes gathered in a swarm.
   I decided something.
   I would try to get some sleep. (THAT)

Seventh graders produced detailed and astonishingly varied texts using exercises such as these. They were also eager to see what their classmates had written from the same SC starters.

How would such an approach work with expository writing? Let's say that your class has just read Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," and you want students to deal with deeper implications of the story in essay form. After discussion, you might use an exercise like the following, encouraging students to first combine sentences, then to tie them together with supporting detail in brief critical papers. Note that each cluster contains a key word or concept that needs development.

1. Jackson builds tension.
   Jackson builds a sense of mystery.
   She describes the atmosphere of the lottery.
   The atmosphere is festive.
2. The lottery is a practice.
   The practice is rooted in tradition.
   Its meaning is now obscure.
   Only its ritual is remembered.
3. The lottery seems to fill a need.
   The need is psychological.
   The lottery has its counterparts.
   The counterparts are modern.

Students would modify such starters to fit their own ideas and arrange transformations in any order.

Other exercises in the same format could provide students with illustrations from which they can generalize.

Another easy-to-use idea is clause expansion. Begin with a base clause—for example, *The teacher began with a base clause*—and ask the class to help you expand it with details and modifiers. The following is a simple paradigm for eliciting responses.

> *Details:* handsome, nervous, friendly, unprepared, demanding
>
> *Attributes:* a skilled professional, a sensitive and dedicated individual, a person whose pants had begun to split
>
> *Actions:* struggled desperately to get responses, realized something was wrong when students started to giggle, helped the class to understand clause expansion

From ideas generated by the students, you can demonstrate how information can be packaged in sentences. In repeating this process with a different base clause, students can generate lists of ideas and then select the details, attributes, and actions they want to include.

A third (more grammatically oriented) approach derives from Francis Christensen's work on generative rhetoric. As discussed in subsection 13 of this chapter, the key to Christensen's sentence-level rhetoric is the notion of the "free modifiers"—additions attached loosely to a base clause. Besides these structures, Christensen identifies principles of modification in "cumulative" sentences. These principles include addition, direction of modification, levels of generality, and texture.

SC can help students understand both grammatical structures and principles of modification. After they see how base clauses can be enriched and focused with free modifiers, they are usually eager to try out these new tools.

Some teachers use model sentences from professionals as anchors, following the sequence outlined by Christensen. In his own teaching, however, Christensen actually worked far more with *student* models. For clear treatments of connections between SC and generative rhetoric, see articles by Glenn J. Broadhead and James Berlin (1981), and by William Stull (1985).

One generative approach that works well is the in-class dramatization. The idea is to begin with a base clause—for example, *The teacher came into the room*—and then to ask students to record a few actions that you pantomime. The dramatization should last no more than ten seconds and might be repeated two or three times. Students should then create free modifiers of various kinds. Here are a few examples of such sentence additions:

> *Verb Clusters (Present and Past Participles):* smirking in a bemused way; glancing at the clock; dressed in a high-fashion outfit; bored and irritated
>
> *Noun Clusters (Appositives):* a trembling, inept substitute; winner of an award for excellence; a burbling fountain of new information
>
> *Adjective Clusters:* warm, friendly, and eager to answer questions; angry about the interruption; tan and exceedingly handsome
>
> *Absolutes:* voice rising in a high-pitched frenzy; his hand fistlike above his head; her lesson plan on ditto sheets

In general, free modifiers like these could be attached *before*, *within*, or *after* the base clause. Modifiers following the base clause, according to Christensen (1981), characterize much professional writing.

Another strategy is to present students with base clauses and accompanying questions. As students answer the questions, they create modifiers that can be related to the base clause. Putting such exercises in whole-discourse formats helps students to create semantically related details. Here is a brief example:

> *The writer sat on the beach.*
>
> Who was she?
>
> What was she doing?
>
> Where was the beach?
>
> *Waves unfolded from the sea.*
>
> What texture were they?
>
> What did they look like?
>
> What precise color was the sea?
>
> What did this color remind her of?
>
> *She reached for her notebook.*
>
> What color was it?
>
> What was it full of?
>
> *She began to go to work.*
>
> Whom was she thinking about?
>
> What did she write with?
>
> What was she trying to do?

Such exercises can be created by teachers working together or derived from professional (or student) texts.

All of this is SC with a difference, of course. Students generate the content of propositions and

then embed them in given base clauses. Such a strategy is recommended by William Michael Kleine (1983), whose critique of SC pedagogy was cited in the Theory and Research section. Kleine, however, goes much further than merely generating structures and playing with possibilities. He seeks to develop an "integrated cuing system," an internalized program of self-initiated probes that helps one to generate, clarify, elaborate, and revise at the sentence level. Put simply, Kleine wants to develop students' ability to monitor output—what he calls "syntactic self-assessment."

One approach that Kleine recommends is for students to focus on the key words in a given base clause. Students generate three short sentences about these words. Then they transform one of these sentences into a free modifier, which in turn can provide the head word for additional transformations. Thus, each student selects and monitors the construction of sentences rather than working with given language.

17. Creating Context for SC Exercises (G)

To date, most whole-discourse SC exercises have been of limited value for teaching more than syntactic skills. While these exercises provide practice in paragraph-level writing, they often do not help students decide how to shape language for a particular audience and purpose.

Probably the most natural (and therefore recommended) approach to SC is to use student writing as the raw material for the exercises. As each student creates an exercise from a draft of work in progress, the inevitable result is better writing. Lack of detail and lapses in reasoning somehow show through when students look closely at writing, and, as we have already seen, using SC is one way of getting students to pay this close attention to prose.

One way to establish minimal context is for students to make choices as they focus on a theme. In activity 15, students first combine clusters to create possible end sentences for a story they will write. Next they select one item from each of columns A, B, and C to give them a character, a setting, and a topic for their story. Finally, they write the story, moving toward the end sentence they have chosen.

You can try emphasizing different elements of fiction in the prewriting work that accompanies such an exercise. Jane Romjue at Maryknoll School in Honolulu chose to emphasize conflict because of literary discussions she had just conducted with her classes. Activity 16 shows a similar exercise that her students enjoyed.

Activities 15 and 16 are ones that middle school students find engaging. And according to research conducted by Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia (1982, 56–57), "the task in which children compose stories leading up to predetermined endings is perhaps the most powerful example of a procedure to by-pass an immature tendency. The immature tendency is to generate text by starting at the beginning and proceeding according to a 'what next?' heuristic. By focusing attention on the ending, a 'how do I get there?' heuristic is invoked instead."

The same format can be adapted to expository or persuasive writing. In activity 17, for example, students consider situation and audience as they generate ideas. Notice that the three clusters from the exercise can also be part of a *single* essay, following the format in the preceding subsection.

To address the problem of context in regular SC, try creating problem-solving "frames" so that students have more basis for comparing sentences and making decisions. Recall, for example, the exercise called "School Politician" in activity 10. Shown below are two possible contexts for this exercise. Notice how these different frames would probably lead to different sentence decisions, not to mention different elaborations beyond the exercise.

1. You are a member of a student advisory committee that helps teachers with school policy. You are writing an essay on classroom management. Your aim is to suggest that good teachers deal swiftly with class clowns.
2. You are a free-lance writer who is doing a humor piece for the school newspaper. You are writing an essay on Tirebiter, a folk hero who keeps school lively and interesting. Your aim is to entertain other students.

Ted Rodgers, a psycholinguist and curriculum developer, suggests another possibility: Have students do combining and then draw one of several contexts for shaping (and reshaping) the prose. Imagine, for example, how the Tirebiter exercise might serve as part of a "My Turn" column in *Newsweek* or as part of a parody in *Mad* magazine.

The point is that exercises can be springboards for writing. (Indeed, I well remember the surprise of seeing one of my SC exercises, "Main Drag, Saturday Night," used as an opener for a Sunday supplement feature in a Longmont, Colorado,

newspaper.) But getting students to follow an exercise with their own prose is not always easy.

Besides suggesting how a given exercise might fit into something larger—for example, as introduction, illustration, or item for comparison—you might help students to cluster, list, freewrite, or work with some other prewriting approach. Such support helps with the kind of assignments described below.

A descriptive SC exercise on waterskiing might be introduced as the ending of a narrative, as prewriting notes for a poem about growing up, or as an illustration/example in an essay concerning protection of the environment. In each context the exercise changes character and becomes something different.

By the same token, an expository exercise about returnable bottles could be used in the context of a larger discussion—regarding, say, principles of positive reinforcement in shaping human behavior. But the same exercise might also be part of an essay on excessive government control. It is such "leaps of context" that students find interesting and challenging. And, obviously, it is these leaps that move SC from the skill-and-drill arena into one called rhetoric.

An entire SC exercise can serve as a "bookend" for a piece of student writing. Consider the possibilities, for example, if we use the previous Tirebiter exercise (activity 10) as a beginning and then follow it with the one in activity 18.

The second exercise raises questions, of course: How did Tirebiter get from the first situation to the second? What happened in the conversation? Is the teacher a "typical" one—or, perhaps, a clown like Tirebiter? In response to such questions, students must write their *own* bridge between "School Politician" and "After School." (Notice, incidentally, that "After School" can also *precede* "School Politician.")

While these illustrations pertain mainly to narrative/descriptive writing, the "bookends" principle seems equally valid for other modes as well. The key is dialectic—some kind of tension between two exercises that students have to resolve.

A final suggestion regarding context is to have students cover up sections of an exercise that they are not yet working with. Then ask them to predict, from what has gone before, what will likely come next in the exercise. This act makes SC more like real writing, with sentences emerging as one moves down the page. Since prediction is a thinking skill that always relates text to context, it deserves practice in SC exercises.

18. Teaching Thinking with SC (MS/HS/C)

We saw earlier that fact sheets require a special kind of language processing in which students select and organize sentences, not merely combine them. This feature makes fact sheets especially useful for training students to be more logical. When the fact sheet uses a contextual frame as described in the previous subsection, it becomes a versatile tool in the given-language workshop.

Let's consider how a fact sheet can prompt parallel writing. The following sheet about memory—part of a larger one that I have used with high school students—consists of related sentences, not predicate phrases with the same head word.

I use this fact sheet to teach comparison-contrast reasoning. The exercise works especially well if each sentence is on a separate strip of paper or a 3-x-5 card; that way the sentences can be moved around easily. I ask students to put sentences in the clearest (most readable) order that they can invent.

1. Short-term memory (STM) is one system.
2. Human memory seems to consist of two systems.
3. The second system is long-term memory (LTM).
4. STM has two subsystems.
5. One subsystem of STM is perceptual processing, which lasts for a minute or less.
6. LTM involves a chemical change in the brain.
7. The second subsystem of STM (working memory) is good for about thirty minutes.
8. STM can only remember about seven items.
9. The capacity of LTM is unlimited because it is hierarchical.
10. Networks of knowledge are created in LTM.

As students deal with this exercise and begin to verbalize what works for them as readers, they glean insights about how to compare and contrast. They might also work with conventional SC that models the same principles. Finally, they test their ideas in brief (paragraph-length) impromptu papers. Here are a few possible prompts. You can no doubt think of others.

> English teachers seem to consist of two basic types.
>
> People who write follow one of two strategies.
>
> There are two varieties of obnoxious salespeople.

ACTIVITY 15

A Story about Friendship

Possible End Sentences:

1. I knew something.
   I had finally made a friend.
   The friend was true.
   The friend would not let me down.
2. He now understood something.
   Friends had betrayed him.
   The friends were angry.
   They wanted to get even.
3. She realized something.
   Friendship required respect.
   The respect was shared.
   Friendship required honesty.

Choices to Be Made:

A	*B*	*C*
You	Cafeteria	Gossip
A male	Classroom	Money
A female	Shopping mall	Secret

ACTIVITY 16

A Story about Trickery

Possible End Sentences:

1. She smiled.
   She thought about her trick.
   Her trick was clever.
   No one had suspected it.
2. The trick had backfired.
   The trick was "foolproof."
   Embarrassment would soon follow.
   The embarrassment would be public.
3. Everyone waited in anticipation.
   The anticipation was breathless.
   The trick played itself out.
   The trick was outrageous.

Choices to Be Made:

A	*B*	*C*
You	Party	Photo
A friend	Beach	Phone call
A teacher	Library	Disguise

ACTIVITY 17

An Essay about Terrorism

Possible End Sentences:

1. Terrorism is a problem.
   The problem may grow worse.
   Issues remain unresolved.
   The issues are political.
2. The planet is a "global village."
   Television has become a tool.
   The tool is psychological.
   Terrorists use the tool.
3. Nations thus face a dilemma.
   The nations are industrialized.
   The dilemma is profound.
   The nations deal with terrorism.

Choices to Be Made:

A	*B*	*C*
Debate	Newspaper	Students
Speech	Radio	Veterans
Editorial	Meeting	Arab League

ACTIVITY 18

After School

1.1 Tirebiter sat at his desk.
1.2 His desk was scarred.
1.3 He stared at his jogging watch.
1.4 It silently ticked off seconds.

2.1 He thought about his teacher.
2.2 She had tried to reason with him.
2.3 He considered her punishment.

3.1 She was well meaning.
3.2 She just didn't understand something.
3.3 His job was to keep students awake.
3.4 His job was in class.

4.1 Something happened after a few moments.
4.2 A smile played across Tirebiter's lips.
4.3 The playing was slow.
4.4 An idea presented itself.

5.1 He thought about his inspiration.
5.2 His inspiration was outrageous.
5.3 He began to chuckle to himself.
5.4 His chuckling was soundless.

6.1 The janitor fumbled with the door lock.
6.2 Tirebiter began to lay plans.
6.3 The plans were for a showdown.
6.4 His teacher would never forget it.

All of us have two different kinds of friends.

Human goals can be divided into two categories.

One excellent model for the thought-promoting fact sheet was developed by Andrea Lunsford (1979). This particular sheet has been duplicated by so many teachers in so many situations that it is fast acquiring permanent status in the Exercise Hall of Fame. While its content is now somewhat dated, it still taps both background knowledge and linguistic skill in a very interesting way. It appears here as activity 19.

Used with high school or college-level writers, this exercise is both do-able and challenging. Students are usually quite interested in each other's solutions and willing to volunteer their difficulties in dealing with the exercise. As you look through the activity, notice how you process its thinking demands.

As you scanned directions for the assignment, you probably started to reread the data. That fact is very important. The task of creating a controlling idea provides a focus for the combining (or relating) that follows. Students inevitably want to talk about strategies for sequencing the data once they have written it out. The topic of transitions then becomes more than dreary lecture or blue-stained worksheets.

Another intriguing (but elegantly simple) model for the fact sheet comes from Lester Faigley (1985), who is interested in the problem of context in given-language interventions. Faigley has described how carefully constructed fact sheets might provide diagnostic information on students' reasoning and writing abilities. A testing tool, of course, can be equally valid as a tool for teaching. A sample of a contextualized fact sheet developed by Faigley is shown in activity 20.

This classification task requires a different kind of thinking than does the Lunsford assignment. Here, the controlling idea is given, and the task is to group and categorize. This too is a skill that deserves focused teaching, not just exhortation.

As you look at these fact sheets and consider how they might be adapted to your particular situation, you may be thinking, "Hey, I could develop something like that!" And indeed you could. Other than a vision of what you want the exercise to do, no special skills are required.

19. Teaching Cohesion with SC (MS/HS/C)

Since SC provides a way into a text, it has the potential for something more than sentence-level instruction. But what is this "something more"? And how can SC be a means to that end?

As just noted, one category of skills is organizational strategies for both thinking and writing. In expository and persuasive writing, the strategies do not rely on spatial or chronological frameworks. Rather, various kinds of logic structure the discourse. Just as individual sentences must follow syntactic rules to make sense, so groups of sentences follow semantic logic to be coherent.

Discourse patterns are even less visible—that is, more abstract—than sentence patterns. With syntax, we can sometimes see the patterns that govern the nesting of structures, one within the other. With discourse, however, we are focused on the meta-abstractions, the mental constructs that we presume are governing text relations. This is slippery business indeed.

But however dangerous it may be, the study of discourse is at the core of our work. Why? Because sentences in the real world occur in texts intended to achieve some communicative aim. Hence, if discourse education is to be functional and make sense to our students, patterns of organization—particularly expository patterns—need to be taught.

To illustrate an analytical approach different from the straightforward modeling of discourse patterns, let's consider a simple middle school exercise.

A Change in Form

1.1 The butterfly has a life cycle.
1.2 The cycle occurs in four stages.

2.1 A female first lays her eggs.
2.2 The eggs number one hundred or more.
2.3 They are on the underside of leaves.

3.1 These eggs hatch into larvae.
3.2 The larvae are wiggling.
3.3 The larvae are called caterpillars.

4.1 Caterpillars grow fast.
4.2 They eat leaves from flowers.
4.3 They eat leaves from bushes.
4.4 They eat leaves from trees.

5.1 They store up fat.
5.2 The fat is for their sleep.
5.3 Their sleep is long.

6.1 This sleep is called a metamorphosis.
6.2 It changes their form.
6.3 The change is from caterpillar to butterfly.

After students have worked through this exercise, they should have six sentences. The purpose of follow-up work is to understand steps in the development of the paragraph from these sentences.

To begin this discussion, you might first want to mention how X rays enable doctors to see inside the human body. Today's lesson, you might say, is like using an X ray on a paragraph. The aim is to see what's going on inside the paragraph—how it works as a piece of writing.

Some key questions to guide the discussion would be these:

1. Which sentence tells what the paragraph is going to be about?
2. What key words in sentence 1 tell you the topic (or main idea) of the paragraph?
3. What other key word in sentence 1 tells you more about the butterfly's life cycle?
4. Why is the word *four* so helpful in this paragraph?
5. What do you expect when you read sentence 1?
6. Does the writer fulfill your expectation?
7. Let's list the four stages. What are they?
8. In which sentences are each of these four points written about?
9. What new term is introduced in sentence 6?
10. How is sentence 6 much like sentence 1?

You might then explain that another type of X ray helps writers to study the invisible connections between sentences. Ask the class to think about pieces of writing that *flow*. What do we mean by *flow*? Perhaps it refers to writing with closely knit sentences. We might picture good prose as a seamless fabric, with no loose (or missing) sentences.

At this point, mention that sentences *point* to one another in order to make sense as a group. By looking at how this pointing works, a person can understand how to revise more effectively. Right after this exercise, you might say, we're going to revise an expository paragraph in our writing folders to apply this skill. But first we need to look at the sentences themselves.

1. The butterfly has a life cycle that occurs in four stages.
2. A female first lays her eggs, numbering one hundred or more, on the undersides of leaves.
3. These eggs hatch into wiggling larvae called caterpillars.
4. Caterpillars grow fast, eating leaves from flowers, bushes, and trees.
5. They store up fat for their long sleep.
6. This sleep, which changes their form from caterpillar to butterfly, is called a metamorphosis.

As students use a new kind of X-ray vision on the paragraph, they will be looking for three kinds of connections (or "links") between pairs of sentences. These links enable the paragraph's meaning to flow from sentence to sentence. Explain that although these links are invisible to the naked eye, they are still very real and important.

In general, the links in one sentence point *back* to some reference point, a word (or phrase) in the preceding sentence. Once in a while, a link will point *ahead* to the following sentence. When several links all point to one sentence, they are "chained" together.

Explain to the class that there are three types of links that help writing cohere:

> *Grammatical Links.* Pronouns such as *this, these, that, he, she, it, they, some, one,* etc., point across sentence boundaries to link sentences together.
>
> *Vocabulary Links.* Repeated words, synonyms, antonyms, and words in the same "family of meaning" point across sentence boundaries to link sentences together.
>
> *Transitional Links.* Signal words and phrases such as *but, however, moreover, in addition, for example, therefore, in conclusion,* etc., point across sentence boundaries to link sentences together.

It is these links that we attend to whenever we read sentences like the metamorphosis paragraph. Good writing has a number of clear links.

Cohesion analysis can be set up on the chalkboard, an overhead transparency, or a worksheet. Show students how words in one sentence point to words in a preceding or following sentence; ask them to read carefully and fill in the linking words on the following chart. (All the words are filled in here for your convenience; delete either the words

ACTIVITY 19

The Lunsford Assignment

Study the following set of data:

1. New York lost 600,000 jobs between 1969–76.
2. In 1975, twenty buildings in prime Manhattan areas were empty.
3. Between 1970–75, ten major corporations moved their headquarters from New York City to the Sunbelt.
4. In 1976, New York City was on the brink of bankruptcy.
5. Between February, 1977 and February, 1978, New York City gained 9,000 jobs.
6. Since January, 1978, one million square feet of Manhattan floor space has been newly rented.
7. AT&T has just built a $110 million headquarters in New York.
8. IBM has just built an $80 million building at 55th and Madison in New York.
9. Co-op prices and rents have increased since 1977.
10. Even $1 million luxury penthouses are sold out.
11. There is currently an apartment shortage in Manhattan.
12. The President recently signed a bill authorizing $1.65 billion in federal loan guarantees for New York City.

After reading and thinking about the information listed above, how would you describe the current economic trend in New York City? Using your answer to that question as an opening sentence, write a paragraph in which you explain and offer support for your conclusion by using the information provided in the original set of data.

Reprinted from Andrea A. Lunsford, 1979, Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer, *College English* 41:45.

ACTIVITY 20

Classification Task

You work for your college newspaper. Your assignment is to use the notes below to write a short article that classifies the major dangers of running. Your article will appear in a special supplement on sports activities. Determine the categories you need and include each of the ideas listed below under one of the categories.

1. Older runners often run too far and too fast and risk heart attacks.
2. Because tired runners often do not look when they cross streets, they are sometimes hit by cars.
3. Some people find runners to be snobbish toward nonrunners.
4. Women running alone have been prime victims of rapists.
5. Regular running can strain joints, which can become a serious problem in later life.
6. It has been suggested that runners have higher divorce rates than nonrunners.
7. Running for some people becomes an end in itself, leading them to neglect their jobs and other responsibilities.
8. Runners often suffer heat exhaustion and heat stroke in hot weather.
9. Runners are often bitten by dogs.
10. Runners suffer from blisters, heel spurs, and shin splints.
11. Running after a meal can cause indigestion.
12. Running has become so commercialized that many of the "extras" are now unaffordable.

Reprinted with permission from Lester Faigley, 1985, Performative Assessment of Writing Skills. In *Sentence Combining: A Rhetorical Perspective*, edited by D. Daiker et al. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press), pp. 180–81.

in the right column or the ones in the left column on your actual sheet.)

Sentence 1	*Sentence 2*
butterfly	female [butterfly]
life cycle	eggs
four stages	first
Sentence 2	*Sentence 3*
eggs	these eggs
eggs	hatch
Sentence 3	*Sentence 4*
caterpillars	caterpillars
hatch	grow
Sentence 4	*Sentence 5*
caterpillars	they
eating leaves	store up fat
Sentence 5	*Sentence 6*
sleep	this sleep
sleep	metamorphosis

The task is for students to figure out one item in each cohesive link, with one given. You may even want youngsters to wear cardboard cutout glasses when using their X-ray vision for cohesion analysis. (Such a gimmick, however nutty, not only appeals to some students but actually reinforces the transfer from one context to another.)

Another approach would be to circle pairs of connecting words in adjacent sentences. (Each pair might be circled with a different colored marker. For many students, colors would probably be more functional than arrows, at least at first.)

Specific rereading instructions would also help. For the metamorphosis exercise, the instructions might say this:

> *Directions:* Reread your sentences carefully. Notice that all sentences point back to the idea of life cycle in sentence 1. How many words can you find that relate to *life cycle*?

After students are comfortable with such directions and the structured activities described above, you can reinforce their awareness of cohesion with generic one-page worksheets with none of the connectors filled in. Students fill in whatever words tie together across sentence boundaries and discuss their observations in small groups.

Teaching students to focus on intersentence cohesion will probably lead them to write more coherent texts. And perceptions of coherence have high correlation with scores of writing quality. Simply put, work with cohesion provides a direct way to help students improve their writing.

20. Selecting, Adapting, and Scheduling SC (G)

How does one select SC exercises? My answer is the same as the one Alan Purves (1973) offered in his methods text, *How Porcupines Make Love:* very carefully.

SC is a potent technique for modeling all kinds of writing, both good and bad. To use poorly constructed exercises undermines much of the benefit that might come from the approach. And, unhappily, some SC materials result in dreadful prose.

The only sure litmus test is to sample exercises yourself or get your class to participate in a consumer field test. If students respond with puzzled looks, pained expressions, and window gazing, you need to try a new product, pronto. After all, nothing happens if they are not actively processing language. So beware of passivity and slack-eyed looks. These lead surely, inevitably, to linguistic rigor mortis.

Virtually all the major textbook series now include SC as a strand in their language development sections. In some cases, this is old (and not very good) wine in new bottles. On the other hand, some publishers are making concerted efforts to sequence SC work intelligently and to use it as a springboard for real writing or revision practice. Be discriminating.

Many SC texts (and related materials) are reviewed by John Dick (1985). His excellent review covers books for basic students at the college level; with minimal adaptation, such materials can be used in high school grades and often at lower grade levels.

Not reviewed in that article are SC books designed specifically for the school market—among them, Marjorie Burns's (1980) *Sentence-Building,* William Horst and Debbie Rosenberger's (1981) *Building English Skills: Sentence Combining,* Frank O'Hare's (1975) *Sentencecraft,* Edgar Schuster's (1981) *Sentence Mastery* (Books A, B, and C), George E. Sullivan and Warren Cox's (1979) *Combining Sentences* or the *Cut the Deck* and *Stack the Deck* series (Cahill and Hrebic 1977, 1980). An educational TV program for elementary students, *The Write Channel,* is available from the Mississippi Authority for ETV.

Other college-level texts that deserve mention are Walter Beale, Karen Meyers, and Laurie White's (1982) *Stylistic Options: The Sentence and the Paragraph,*

Beth Neman's (1983) *Writing Effectively*, Richard Nordquist's (1985) *Writing Exercises: Building, Combining, and Revising*, and William Stull's (1983) *Combining and Creating: Sentence Combining and Generative Rhetoric*. While I am sure that additional materials are out there, they have not yet crossed my desk.

The general principles for adapting SC exercises to your classroom are these:

1. Look over an exercise carefully before you use it in class. Pull out vocabulary that you will need to go over, and put it on the board. If you want to recluster the sentences to make the exercise easier or more challenging, put this information on the board also. Set up signals (see subsection 1) or closure cues (see subsection 4) to assist students with difficult transformations.
2. In introducing the exercise, activate students' prior knowledge about the SC topic. Relate it to their personal experience, to current events, or to previously studied materials. Have students predict what the exercise will be about from its title. Deal with difficult (or interesting) words in advance of combining. Using ideas from subsections 17 and 18 of this chapter, set a rhetorical context—a purpose and audience to guide decisions about sentences.
3. Establish the purpose (skill focus) for combining. Tell students what to pay attention to as they do the exercise; if necessary, also make suggestions about decombining, rearranging, elaborating, or doing a second level of combining. Mention that an application assignment, focused on the target skill, will follow the combining practice. Structure the groups, following suggestions in subsection 3.
4. In working with student responses to the exercise, reemphasize the rhetorical context for sentence decisions (step 2) and the skill focus (step 3). If the focus has been on parallel structure, for example, have students verbalize the specific effects of a repeated grammatical pattern. If the focus has been on variety in sentence length or structure, have students relate their decisions to purpose and audience.
5. Make explicit transfer from the SC exercise to a parallel writing (or revising) activity. Tell students to keep in mind what they learned as they adapt their real writing to its purpose and audience. After students have finished this task, ask them to talk about it as they bring their writing to peer response groups. A writing process journal, where students think aloud about writing, is also an excellent tool for consolidating this learning.

In addition to SC materials in textbooks, exercises are now becoming available on computer software. Again, these materials are uneven in quality. Pay special attention to the sequencing of transformations, the quality of direct instruction and feedback, and the appropriateness of content.

As for the scheduling of SC exercises, no single solution will satisfy all programs. The basic question for faculty dialogue concerns the role of SC in language development and writing instruction. And as we saw in the Theory and Research section, experts disagree on the role, if any, that SC should play in the writing class.

To some people, SC should play a minimal role; to others, it is a very important method of developing syntactic fluency and improved writing and thinking skills. The critics contend that SC, at least as typically used, is "non-naturalistic" and perhaps even harmful to the development of real discourse abilities since it diverts attention from personal meaning making. The proponents point to the track record in empirical research, asserting that no other direct intervention even approaches the effectiveness of SC.

Conflicting assumptions about the role of intervention—even the goals of education—lie only slightly beneath the surface of this debate. Moreover, many of the critics are realists. Because they know how schools work as institutions, they also know that SC has potential to become the new orthodoxy—what I have called a busywork curriculum—diverting the profession even further from the human and cognitive aims of writing instruction. Such a prospect is depressing to anyone who cares about what happens in schools.

And so the problem of how to allocate time is, at root, an ethical question: How will you use SC, if and when you use it? Will it be a way to keep students mindlessly "on task," ignoring larger purposes? Or will it be an approach that fits in with larger goals for writing instruction? What *are* those goals?

If SC *is* used, I recommend that it be done twice a week, three times at most, for periods of twenty minutes or so in grades 4–8, longer in high school and college classrooms. This is enough time for

some sharing and comparing, without putting students to sleep. Although I am aware of research that suggests SC should be done as a unit, I believe that spaced practice helps achieve a cumulative psychomotor effect.

The proportion of time you spend on various SC formats is another question. John Mellon (1979) recommends that teachers average two cued problems daily and two whole-discourse exercises weekly. This regimen appeals to me because it is easy to manage and has good prospects for success. Frequency of practice, more than duration, seems the key to automaticity.

Of course, you may eschew typical SC altogether and move toward generative exercises, dewriting, or fact sheets. Or you may invent some new style of intervention that helps you to achieve specific aims in your writing program.

So the answer to time allocation is "it depends." SC will certainly vie with other activities for instructional emphasis. You should use those that have, in your opinion, the greatest potential for success, not merely those that are fashionable. As the saying goes, "You pays your money, and you takes your choice."

Sentence Combining in Retrospect

Having worked your way through the preceding subsections, you may be wondering how you can remember the many possibilities for the SC approach. You can't, of course, not without trying some of the ideas to see if they work with your students. So start with an angle that seems manageable, and see how your students respond. Sort through the strategies, adapting them to your situation.

You may also have questions about how to help with the transfer of skills from SC to real writing. While there is no doubt that many students soon become adept at rearranging sentence parts in an exercise, learning to do this in actual writing assignments does require work.

To improve the likelihood of transfer effects, you can sometimes begin with a challenge like, "Let's try this exercise without using *and* as a connector." A follow-up writing task, perhaps growing from the SC stimulus, would have a similar prompt for linguistic "stretching." Also, you might challenge students to revise a paragraph in their writing folders or journals by using the same guidelines. (The result would be a paragraph like this one—that is, without coordination.)

A second kind of lesson might begin with a different sort of challenge: "Let's change the wording in this exercise so that it's formal on the one hand, casual on the other." The exercise could provide content for focused talk about diction; this could be followed with parallel tasks focused on the students' own prose. Positive versus negative connotation, abstract versus concrete diction—these too are possible "centers" for SC practice.

Transfer can also be enhanced by blurring the distinctions between exercises and the students' own writing. For example, students might put their own sentences among the clusters of SC exercises. And why can't they add details to exercises or rearrange sentences to create radically different prose from the same basic beginnings?

As noted earlier, many teachers also have success in asking students to decombine a selected passage from their writing in progress. With an SC exercise derived from student prose, there are three main applications: (1) the exercise provides the basis for a writing conference, (2) a problem passage is handled in a classroom workshop, or (3) students recombine sentences from an exemplary passage and compare them with the writer's original version.

Using real subject matter in SC exercises is also a key to the question of transfer. If students are comparing two treatments of a literary theme, discussion notes can be "published" by groups. As students transform these notes, they are simultaneously learning content and improving their writing skills.

Finally, some teachers now use SC exercises to teach form and depth in essay answers. An exercise that responds to a sample test item, for example, helps students to get a feel for what is expected of them. In fact, modeling the skill of writing short essays may make the usual exhortations unnecessary—a relief, no doubt, to all concerned.

As you consider the question of transfer, think too about the miracle of language learning—children coming to school, from all kinds of situations, somehow having figured out how spoken words go together. Clearly, linguistic ability is there. Can we help students to use what they already know? Can we set up a print environment in which they figure out even more? Can we allow the classroom community to provide much of the feedback?

Jerome Bruner (1983, 176) sums up the challenge beautifully:

> Language is for using, and the uses of language are so varied, so rich, and each use so preemptive a way of life, that to study it is to study the world and, indeed, all possible worlds.

We are talking here about going back to the basics—letting language do the teaching. Language play and exploration should guide our work. Our goal should be to make the writing class a place where students focus on the codes and structures of written language without threats or coercion.

In other words, if we could just make the play that goes on in the writing class a little more like the play that occurs in the laundromat in the following poem, our problems would be pretty much solved.

> Language Learning in the Laundromat
>
> The day cools and the traffic thins.
> Washers and dryers spin heavy loads,
> A Mobius strip of tumbling clothes.
> A young man stands, stretching,
> Lifting his first-born love
> First around, then above.
> Relaxed and oh-so-limp,
> In a cradle of arms,
> She seems to sigh,
> Closes her eyes,
> As if to sleep.
> Lips and word,
> Breath so low,
> Nuzzle a braid,
> Murmuring sound,
> The words so slow
> To tickle, a-tickle,
> Her gold-flecked ear.
> She is coy and smiling,
> Precocious beyond her year,
> Her lashes lowered—waiting—
> Lifting her face to his to hear
> And learning the whispers like love.

But until that time comes, here is a list of twenty teaching suggestions, mostly just getting-started reminders.

1. Discuss the purpose of SC—to make good sentences, not necessarily long ones. Explain that a person becomes more flexible (and precise) in language by exploring the variety of ways to transform given meanings (short sentences).
2. Encourage students to take risks with solutions to SC problems, trying out new sentence patterns before making a choice. Emphasize that through language *stretching* (and paying attention) a person acquires new skills and insights.
3. Provide a positive environment for risk taking by accepting various solutions to SC exercises. When marginal (or ungrammatical) solutions are offered, refer them to the class for judgment or comparison with better sentences.
4. Use signaled exercises, context clues, and oral prompts to help skill-deficient students see how SC works. Also use these approaches with able students when introducing more complex transformations. Then move to open SC for practice.
5. After modeling how SC exercises work, put students in pairs to work their way through an exercise orally, taking turns on SC clusters. Put a group solution together after this rehearsal, using the chalkboard or overhead projector.
6. When students are working in pairs, have one student act as scribe for the other; then reverse roles (with the rule that no two sentences can be the same). Have students discuss problem areas (punctuation, usage, etc.) and work out solutions.
7. Have pairs of students develop options for an SC exercise—and then agree on the best sentence for write-outs. Ask students to explain to each other why they prefer particular sentences. Emphasize reading aloud in context.
8. In round-robin combining, encourage students to listen closely. Have students come up with as many solutions to an SC cluster as they can. Then ask students to vote on the best sentences in context. Discuss reasons for their choices.
9. Be specific in your praise of good sentences. Ask students to read aloud (or to repeat) sentences that have some nicely turned phrases. Decombine effective sentences for in-class comparisons. Tell what you like about these sentences.
10. Welcome mistakes as opportunities for group problem solving. Communicate that you expect students to make disastrous sentences in the process of learning to make good ones. Use the mistakes as a basis for skill learning in editing workshops.

11. Using transformations handed in by students, identify (by bracketing) a group of very good (or problematic) sentences. Ask students to transcribe these onto transparencies, the chalkboard, or a circulating ditto master for in-class workshops.
12. Assign an exercise for homework, asking two or three students to put their work on a ditto master. Compare these versions in class. Have students compare their work with sentences analyzed in class by checking preferred versions.
13. Brainstorm with a class how an exercise could be made more specific and detailed with additional information. Generate details in groups. Put these details between exercise sentences, or elaborate given SC clusters. Then compare.
14. Have students write out solutions to various SC clusters (or fact sheets) on note cards. Shuffle the cards and ask students to rearrange them into a clear, coherent paragraph. Use such models as a basis for parallel (real) writing.
15. Use SC as a springboard for journal writing. Have students do an exercise each day and extend that exercise with sentences of their own. Regard these exercises as ungraded fluency work. Try using famous quotations as source material.
16. Have students combine sentences in a lean, direct style. Contrast the effects of active and passive voice or straightforward and inverted prose. Focus on economy, clarity, and precision in sentences.
17. Ask students to compare their style with that of professional writers. To do this, break a passage down into short sentences, and then have students recombine them and compare their versions with the original. Use dewriting and imitation in the same way.
18. Analyze an SC exercise (written out) for tone, cohesion, method of development, logical patterns, etc. For example, students might trace links between sentences (or paragraphs) or discuss the rhetorical strategy for the exercise.
19. Create original SC focused on specific transformations, course content, or discourse patterns. Establish context to make exercises as useful as possible. Use the "bookends" principle and try using end sentences as SC writing starters.
20. Emphasize transfer of learning by drawing SC from student texts and from literature being studied. Have students revise their writing with a focus on particular SC skills. Follow SC work with parallel writing tasks for application.

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"Words are wonderful teachers," says author William Strong, as he describes the power of sentence combining. Strong argues here for a broader definition of sentence combining—one that encompasses a range of cognitive activities. For example, sentence combining can

- contribute to students' syntactic fluency as they learn to explore stylistic options.
- teach such logical skills as decision making, analysis, and synthesis.
- teach content, as well as writing skills, in areas such as science, social studies, and literature.

Creative Approaches to Sentence Combining contains a variety of activities, some appropriate for every grade level from elementary through college. Here is just one of the shorter exercises:

The Tattoo Artist

Directions: The problem sentence is technically correct but poorly written. Rewrite it in a clear, direct way, using the fewest possible words.

A tattoo artist had designs.
The artist was "withdrawn."
The designs were wild.
The designs were on a go-go dancer.
The dancer worked at the Polar Bar.
The Polar Bar was in Kodiak, Alaska.

Problem: An individual who was somewhat "withdrawn" and who worked in the field of tattoo artistry had what might possibly have been termed "wild designs" on a go-go dancer whose place of employment was, reportedly, the Polar Bar, which is located in the city of Kodiak, in the state of Alaska. (50 words)

Rewrite: _____
_____

This and the other playful yet practical exercises will help activate your students' attention to written language. And with the guidelines provided by the author, you can even learn to create your own sentence-combining exercises from literature, student writing, and other sources. Help your students develop independence in writing through creative SC!

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